Kathleen Wynne, Ontario's new education minister

ONE OF OUR OWN

By Clayton Graves

ESL teachers across the province were delighted with the announcement on September 18, 2006 that Don Valley West MPP Kathleen Wynne has become the new minister of education in Premier Dalton McGuinty's provincial cabinet.

As the announcement became public, one local ESL teacher enthused, "Finally, a minister of education who knows *our* issues from the inside out. Dare I call her 'one of our own'? I couldn't be more pleased."

The new minister brings first-rate qualifications to the position. She has been an energetic and committed politician, a community activist, an adult educator in ESL and a facilitator, with strong connections in the education sphere. Ms Wynne is, in addition, a knowledgeable and passionate advocate of a strong publicly funded school system.

In 2000, she was elected as the Public School Trustee for Ward 8 on the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). She was also the founder of the Toronto Parent Network, a citywide group that fought for better public education. She was first elected to the Legislature in 2003.

Wynne spoke to our TESL Ontario Fall Conference in November 2005, shortly after the release of her report *Ontario Learns: Strengthening our Adult Education System* which addressed, among other subjects, gaps of servicing and funding and other critical issues related to ESL learners.

In her address to TESLOntario, Wynne drew special attention to the thorny problem of access to professions for internationally-educated professionals and the development of sector-specific English language upgrading programs for professionally-trained new arrivals.

In particular, she noted that in her riding of Don Valley West, "I see lots of disappointed professional people who are struggling to reconnect with their professions and become fully-accredited

Kathleen Wynne, Ontario's new minister of Education (continued)

Family photo: Kathleen and Jane with Chris, Maggie and Jessie

(Continued from page 1)

here. They have problems getting certification and then, once certified, face the hurdle of dealing with biases against speakers with 'foreign accents'. This disappointment also has an impact on their children who are themselves ESL students in our schools, and indeed on their whole family life. They are looking to government for help, and that becomes part of our mandate."

Wynne is a strong advocate for cross-ministry communications in the area of adult education so that ESL – and especially the provision of adequate funding resources for ESL - doesn't fall through the cracks. She called for vigilance in tracking the funding for language programs, for example, so that the resources slated for ESL actually go to meet ESL needs, and don't get siphoned off to other school programs.

Ms. Wynne acknowledges the critical role that TESL Ontario plays in helping governments to solve the issues of good delivery of educational services to those in need. In sending congratulatory wishes to the new minister, TESL Ontario President Sharon Rajabi stated, "Kathleen Wynne has demonstrated indepth knowledge of our field, and is well aware of its challenges. We look forward to working with her to assist the province in its work on key ESL issues in schools."

We join with all key stakeholders in wishing new Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne well as she tackles head-on the many challenges in providing the best possible educational system in Ontario. ❖

Contact us

Contact welcomes articles of general interest to association members, including announcements, reports, articles, calls for papers and news items.

Contributors should include their full name, title and affiliation. Text should be e-mailed to: teslontario@telus.net or mailed on CD to:

Editor
TESL Association of Ontario,
27 Carlton Street, Suite 405,
Toronto, Ontario, M5B 1L2

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From the editor

Thinking is linking. I can't recall the first time I read that catchy phrase, but it was sometime before the pervasive presence of the internet in our world. It's one of those appealing constructions that, in its simplicity, seems intuitively to explain how we learn, and especially how we learn language.

In a broader sense, we draw insights from the past as a bridge to the present and to help us shape the future. We connect and reconnect.

So it is with *Contact*. We draw from experience – the successes, the false starts, the experiments – as we strive to make it a professional development newsletter that will serve you with relevant, informative content across the span of ESL engagements, from K to university. At the same time, we explore new technologies to make *Contact* both user-friendly and appealing.

In this issue, we applaud the recent elevation of **Kathleen Wynne** to the position of Minister of Education in Ontario. With some pride we claim her as 'one of our own' and wish her all the best in her new position. Ms Wynne's background in education as teacher, parent and advocate will serve her well in that most demanding of portfolios.

We are also happy to introduce to you six new members of the TESL Ontario Executive Board. Their experience and wisdom will serve us well as they join their colleagues in helping our organization to meet the emerging challenges of our wonderful profession.

In an opinion piece, Toronto secondary school teacher **Bijan Moss** identifies some of the pitfalls of using standardized tests to gauge the progress of high school ESL students in mainstream academic courses. Moss calls upon secondary level teachers to invent, adapt, and employ creative and fair solutions in their assessments.

In her article, "A Dynamic Perspective on Grammar", **Karen Grunow-Hårste** of Brock University reminds us that language is organic - it grows and changes –and we are well-advised as teachers to attend to the nature and processes of such change. Readers with a literary bent will be either highly amused or horrified by the inclusion of a 'texting' synopsis of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as just one example of the effect of emerging technology on our language. (I was amused; a long time friend wasn't.)

Karen Thomson points and clicks us to Websites for both ESL students and teachers in "Internet Corner". Surf's up, so dive in and discover.

For those who contemplate teaching ESL abroad, **Zulfikar Mulji's** personal reflections about teaching in China offers an informative primer on what to expect.

Two books are reviewed in this issue. ESL teacher, **Nan Doe** of Listowel, Ontario joins the ranks of punctuation sticklers in recommending that all language teachers read – and heed – the best-selling *Eats, Shoots & Leaves – The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* by Lynne Truss. Clayton Graves reviews the novel, *The Swallows of Kabul* by Yasmina Khadra. Both reviews provide readers with extracts that give a flavor of the text.

Robert Courchêne of the University of Ottawa's Second Language Institute documents the ups and downs of developing reliable language assessment instruments in his research report, "The Challenges of Preparing a One-size-fits-all Test". The process demands both flexibility and a willingness to abandon what doesn't fit in an effort to find what does.

And finally, **Man Chu Lau** explores a teaching approach designed to enhance junior high ESL students' literacy by helping them become critical, questioning readers in "Can Questions be the Answer?"

In assembling this issue of *Contact*, we thank all the contributors, and a special thanks goes to **Laura Stoutenburg** of Conestoga College for her dynamism and support. As always, we welcome your submissions to and opinions on our stories, articles and reports. We extend our best wishes for an exciting school year and hope to see many of you at the Fall Conference in Toronto, November 16 – 18th. ❖

Clayton Graves,

Editor

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Executive board candidates
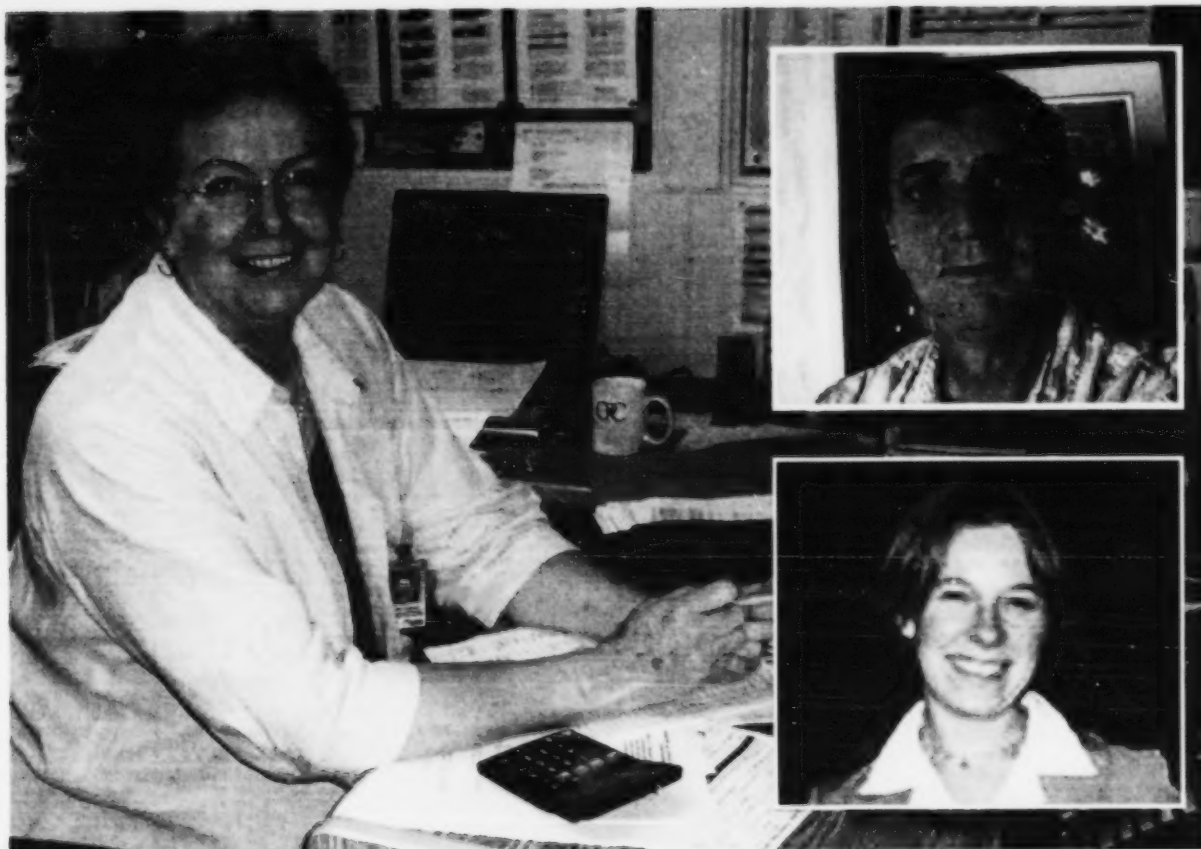
We are very pleased to present to you the slate of candidates for TESL Ontario's Board positions for the year 2006/2007. Clockwise, from left: Sheila Carson at her desk, Kevin O'Brien, Saskia Stille.

President-elect: Sheila Carson

Sheila Carson is Adult ESL/ LINC Coordinator for the Thames Valley District School Board in London, Ontario. She has been involved in the field of ESL since 1992. After a long career in the classroom, she became Lead ESL/LINC instructor prior to accepting her present administrative position. She has chaired numerous committees, been involved in curriculum development, CALL delivery, Canadian Language Benchmark implementation, TESL training, and has also served as President of OSSTF District 11 Instructor Bargaining Unit. Sheila has been on the Executive of TESL London as both Adult and LINC representative, as Membership Secretary, President and Affiliate Director. She has given several workshops at both the local and provincial levels.

Technology and Research Chair: Kevin O'Brien

Kevin O'Brien has been a teacher since 1968 and has worked in all levels, from elementary to secondary to adult education. He has been teaching adults since 1985, working in the Adult Literacy and ESL department for the Ottawa Board of Education. He continued teaching until his retirement from teaching in 2002 and has been the TESL Ontario Webmaster for several years. Kevin has presented at many conferences and has conducted numerous teacher training sessions dealing with how to use technology for language learning. He has also

Executive board candidates

conducted teacher training for most software packages for the Ottawa Carleton Board of Education. Kevin continues to present at conferences, to train individuals, and to assist small not-for-profit organizations in integrating the latest technologies into their organizations. He is also the webmaster for several environmental groups.

Public Relations & Issues Chair: Saskia Stille

Saskia Stille is the co-founder of the English School of Canada, an ESL school for international students that has welcomed more than 5000 students from 41 different countries since its inception. In 2002 the school was awarded Best New Youth Business, and in 2003 ranked on the PROFIT HOT 50 list of emerging Canadian growth companies. Saskia has served on the executive boards of TESL Ontario, TESL Toronto, and the Canadian Association of Private Language Schools, and is active in raising the profile of international education and youth entrepreneurship in Canada.

Conference Chair: Cheryl Richman

Cheryl Richman works as an ESL Program Officer in Continuing Education at the Toronto District School Board. She has been working in the field of ESL for over 17 years. She has served on the TESL Toronto Board as President, conference chair and treasurer (current position). She was TESL Ontario's Conference Chair for 2005 and continues in that position for 2006. Cheryl has also presented frequently at TESL Toronto and TESL Ontario.

Cheryl Richman

Members at Large (2 positions)

Marilyn Johnston

Marilyn Johnston of Windsor has been an ESL teacher since 1983 both in Ottawa and Windsor. From 1995 to the present she has been a CLBA Assessor and a CLBPT Assessor, providing placement and exit assessments for the Greater Essex county District School Board Adult ESL pro-

Many fields of endeavour: member-at-large Marilyn Johnston

Executive board candidates

Jennifer Freudenthal

years Jennifer has taught both English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language to children and adults.

This fall she begins teaching French and Civics at Kipling Collegiate Institute in Toronto, a school where over 70 per cent of the students are non-native speakers of English. She hopes to continue to act as an advocate on behalf of teachers, administrators and learners alike. ❖

gram. Her career highlights include teaching elementary school French, writing curriculum and serving on the Executive of TESL Windsor and OSSTF District 9. Marilyn is happily owned by a cat and a dog.

Jennifer Freudenthal

With a Master's degree in Education from the State University of New York at Buffalo, Jennifer Freudenthal has been a member of both the New York State Association for Bilingual Education and New York State TESOL. She moved to Toronto in August, 2004 and immediately became involved with the TESL community. Over the last four

A note about interactivity

This document is an interactive PDF. By clicking on the **Bookmark** tab or icon (depending on the version of PDF reader you are using), you will see a clickable Index of the articles.

By clicking a blue link you can send an e-mail or view a related web site.

By clicking an item on the front page **Table of Contents** you will move to that article.

Internet Corner
by Karen Thomson

In this column we highlight just a few internet websites that you can explore with your classes or for yourself.

For Listening

1. CBC archives – a real treasure. Listen to old radio programs or watch old TV Shows. Lots of options. You can search by Subject from the Topic Index:
http://archives.cbc.ca/index.asp?IDLan=1

For Pronunciation Practice

1. Sounds of English – An outstanding site for both students and teachers with copiable handouts: http://soundsofenglish.org

2. Phonetics – the sounds of spoken language. University of Iowa.
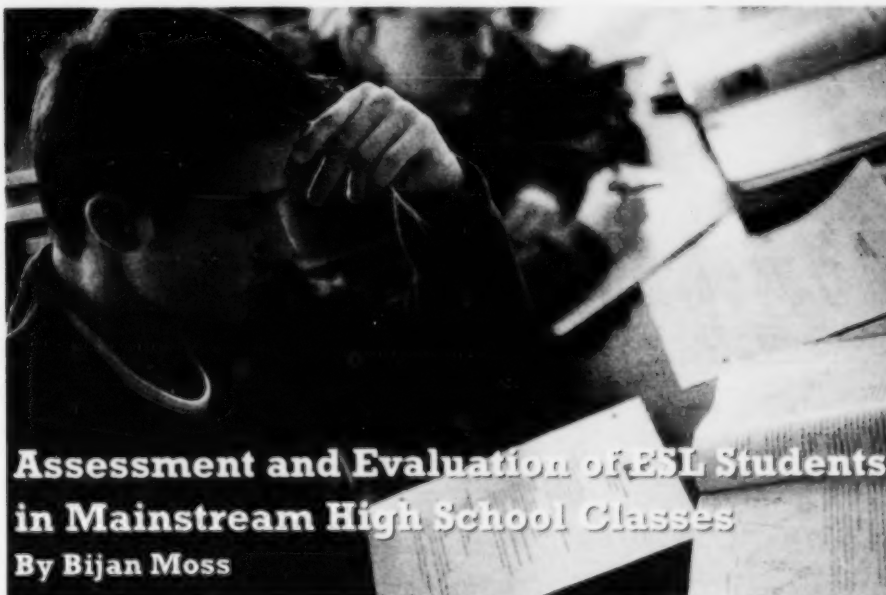
This fantastic site shows you diagrams of the mouth with animation and sound clips. It also shows the anatomy of articulation.
http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics

For Busy Teachers

1. ESL Flow.com

This site offers you ready-made lessons, with lots of links to other sites and helpful tips. It's organized into levels or themes.

http:// www.eslflow.com

Assessment and Evaluation of ESL Students in Mainstream High School Classes

By Bijan Moss

Today, not only do ESL students face a challenge, but so do their teachers, especially when it comes to evaluating the students. Often teachers ask, "How am I supposed to evaluate these students when they can neither read nor write? Furthermore, some of them aren't even literate in their own first language. What am I supposed to do and how do I "benchmark" their progress?" These are legitimate questions that must be addressed.

As a former ESL learner and now a teacher with over 15 years of teaching experience, I believe because of demographic changes within our communities and consequently our classes, we need to change not only our assessment tools and techniques, but also our teaching strategies.

It is not practical to rely on a series of preset, standardized tests or scantron quizzes that have been used for decades. These tools require modification in order to evaluate our multi-level classes of varying ethnic backgrounds and needs. Merely obtaining a numerical grade does not reflect properly upon a student's achievement.

Every year we face a different group of students with different aptitudes and capabilities. Therefore, we need to open our minds and consider all of the facts and the changes that are taking place daily, before choosing the assessment tools and techniques that we need to implement. This may seem like it's an extra workload that would contribute to our emotional and physical stresses, but is there any other choice?

We need to know and understand our ESL students before we can establish assessment standards and subject the students to impossible expectations.

From my experiences, the majority of new immigrants (including myself) came to Canada from troubled countries for a safer life and to be in an environment where they could provide a better future for their children. These immigrants are new to the Canadian mosaic and face many other stresses and situations they need to deal with, over and above the language barriers that they face.

In many cases, the parents of these ESL students have not yet found jobs, yet they still have the responsibility of supporting their families while at the same time must seek some kind of employment to make ends meet.

Some of the students work after school as well to help meet their own personal expenses and to contribute to the welfare of their families.

These ESL students are graded on a preliminary assessment, which takes their ages into account. Obviously, some

"Some of the students work after school... to help meet their own personal expenses and to contribute to the welfare of their families."

ESL Students in Mainstream Classes (continued)

of these students may not be able to perform up to our expectations, yet they have to be assessed.

To evaluate these students isn't impossible. I strongly believe that we can trust our instincts and professional judgment when it comes to evaluating them. If we are teaching any subject other than English, one fact has to be kept in mind; even though our aim is the overall spiritual and academic development of our students, we are not language teachers, but we do evaluate their skills in that particular subject.

This is possible by modifying our teaching strategies and creating teacher-made, customized tests and quizzes appropriate to the abilities of our current students, and at the same time reflect their practical skills.

> "I was shocked when two of my students came to me one day and told me that their science marks were reduced ... just because the teacher stated that they could not speak English well."

I was shocked when two of my students came to me one day and told me that their science marks were reduced (5 marks) just because the teacher stated that they could not speak English well, as compared to other Canadian students!

"Teachers must use a variety of evaluation techniques in order to obtain information on the different aspects of students learning ability, thus providing a reliable foundation for judgment, decisions and amendments of judgment."

Some other approaches, such as interviews with the help of an interpreter, consistent communication with other subject teachers and parents, self-evaluation and peer-evaluation techniques, may be incorporated to help in the assessment of ESL students. Moreover, within a couple of sessions we teachers, to some extent, develop a better sense of our students' abilities, commitment and attitudes towards the subject, which is quite helpful in the assessment process.

This is an undeniable challenge that most of us deal with on a daily basis, but on the other hand, it is our professional responsibility to do our best and come up with a fair evaluation process and provide the students with the necessary education that will prepare them to be effective and contributing members of our society.

To achieve our goal we need to update our objectives and standards of assessment; modify our strategies, and incorporate teacher-made assessment and evaluation tools and activities that are appropriate to our students' interests, personalities, attitudes and aptitudes. ❖

Bijan Moss is a teacher at James Cardinal McGuigan Catholic High School, Toronto.

A Dynamic Perspective on Grammar

By Karen Grunow-Hårsta
Dept. of Linguistics, Brock University

I *coulda did good", "me and my friends are....", "youse guys" or "between you and I"...*

When I hear expressions like these, I find myself commiserating with H.W. Fowler, who, in his *Modern English Usage*, stated that such utterances, "...must be condemned at once. Anyone who uses [them]... lives in a grammarless cavern" (1998: 371).

However, condemnation is a knee-jerk reaction and best tempered by patience and perspective, by the latter I mean historical and cultural perspective. I remind myself that usage I might cringe at today could once have been standard English, may become standard English, or is standard in a variety of English different from my own.

Languages, like the speakers who use them, vary and change. As David Crystal (1999: 2) has sagely observed: "...linguistic change is unavoidable, an intrinsic feature of language, deep-rooted in its social milieu... Try to stop linguistic change... and you have to stop social change. It would be easier to stop the tide coming in."

Responses to change vary in the extreme; to some change is debasement, to others it is diversity and a natural development. Given that change is inevitable, whether we like it or not, we ought to be prepared for it. The purpose of my paper is to encourage understanding and acceptance of language change and of variation which results from change.

I work under the assumption that we are better prepared for and can more willingly accept what we understand; thus, as language teachers we should understand the nature and processes of language change. The more we know of these, the more open to and equipped to deal with linguistic change we will be.

To this end, the paper introduces basic concepts of language change: its nature, including rate, scope and causes,
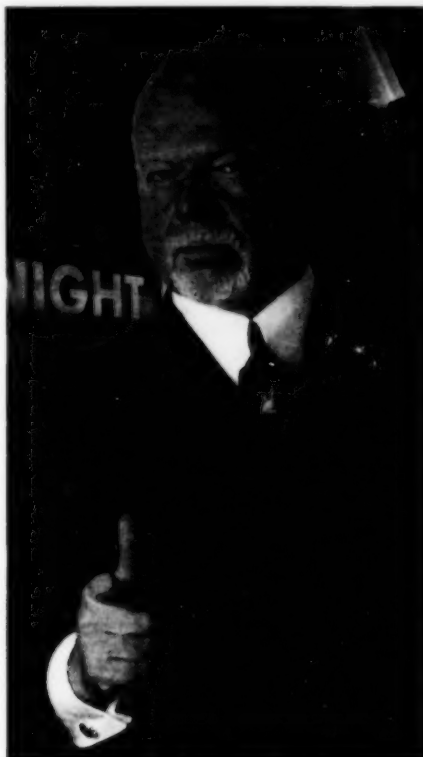
Don Cherry: Youse guys know what I'm talkin' 'bout. (Photo: CBC Sports)

as well as processes including morphological (vocabulary) and morpho-syntactic (grammar) changes.

Change is a fact of life and of language; it is inevitable. We cannot predict precisely how language will change, but there are pathways and directions of change, which have been observed across languages (Graddol, Traugott). Language change, as with language as a whole, is systematic and rule governed. Change is not random and does not result in chaos. Processes of change can be analyzed and understood.

Change is also thorough-going and occurs in every aspect of language:

"Anyone who [speaks like this]... lives in a grammarless cavern."

A Dynamic Perspective on Grammar (continued)

the sound system (phonology), morphology and morpho-syntax. I will focus only on select examples of the latter two.

Causes of change can be internal, meaning that languages have an inherent propensity to self-regulate and re-order themselves; and causes can be external, meaning that extra-linguistic forces such as language contact and technological or social pressure can cause change. The rate of language change is accelerated due to external forces, e.g. language contact has increased and with it change.

Crystal observes that, "[A]lthough the history of world English can be traced back 400 years, the current growth spurt has a history of less than 40 years." (1997: 110). This growth spurt is largely the result of different languages and different variants of English in contact. Contact and the lack thereof have been, and still are, major forces in the formation of the 'Englishes' spoken world-over.

Separation has resulted in such varieties as: Australian, South African, Indian, and Singaporean English to mention only a few. Each of these varieties, in turn, is influenced and changed by the languages that surround them. By some estimates there are close to one billion speakers of English and the increase in the number of speakers of English has also led to an increase in variation. The multiplicity of Englishes, interacting and influencing each other, puts tremendous pressure on the language to change; thus, English as it is spoken around the globe is a heterogeneous and quickly evolving tongue.

Moreover, the primary medium of contact today is information communication technology (ICT), and ICT is itself a force for change and has further accelerated the rate of change across all languages. *The Oxford Guide to World English* (1997: 3) records that, "Some 75% of the world's mail and the world's electronically stored information is in English.

Of an estimated 40 million users of the internet in 1997, a majority used English." For most of these users English is not a first language, which results in a language contact situation and further increases the pressure for change.

Significantly, the medium of contact in ICT is the written word. Typically, written language is more conservative than spoken.

Change usually takes place first in the spoken communication and it is in writing that the standard is preserved by the media, by users, and by teachers (For example, it is students' written work that receives the most grammatical feedback and correction). Written communication is normally a stabilizer and 'puts the brakes on change'.

However the nature of ICT communication, via email and chat rooms, is rapidly changing the nature of written language. As Heather Lotherington (2001: 7) observed, "[T]he informal and immediate nature of written communication in chat rooms etc. is blurring traditional communicative boundaries between speech and
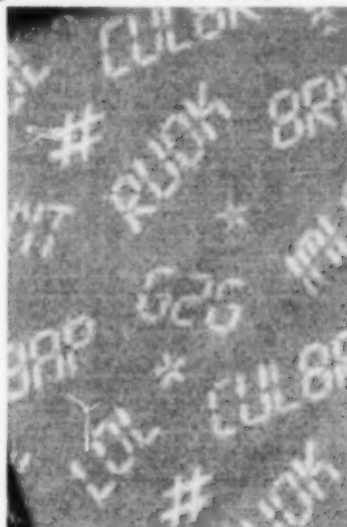
Get the msg: fabric printed with text-message lingo sells by the yard on e-Bay

A Dynamic Perspective on Grammar (continued)

writing.... The traditional dichotomy between written language and oral language is quite simply melting in electronic contexts." Likewise, Hansson and van de Bunt-Kokhuis (2004: 2) observe that ,"E–mail has its own language, a mixture of written and spoken language".

Crystal (2001) has deemed the texts in ICT to be a "third medium". Thus, writing, which has been traditionally conservative and resistant to change, is now an arena for change.

How are these changes manifested? Lotherington notes that, "Writing conventions and standards are being re-written daily ...Conventional spelling and capitalization seems to have become rather optional in many electronic language environments, formality registers are disappearing." (2001: 7). She writes that formal vocabulary and literary terms are becoming, "doomed to extinction in paper texts" (2001: 7).

How, as teachers, do we cope with change? We cope by understanding it. To this end, the paper will now introduce fundamental mechanisms and processes of change. It will focus only on those aspects of change that are most prevalent in written electronic communication. These include morphological (word-formation) processes such as: conversion, clipping, blends, and acronyms. The paper will also describe change on a morpho-syntatic level with focus on a process known as grammaticalization.

Conversion refers to the process by which a word, without the help of affixes, shifts into another word category. For example, conversion frequently leads to noun/verb pairs, for example, we 'update' (verb) and when we've updated we have an update (noun). Thus conversion makes it possible 'to update an update' or to 'text (write) a text'.

Another process, clipping, refers to shortening words, usually by 'clipping' the end. Names are frequently clipped

Samuel → Sam. Political Science →Poli-Sci. Physical Education →Phys. Ed.

Other examples of common nouns are deli, porn, lab, condo, narc. Blends occur when words meld together for example, 'smoke' plus 'fog' > smog. Other examples include:

modulator + demodulator → modem

- Spanish + English → Spanglish
- information + commercial → infomercial
- spiced + ham → Spam (which has now undergone a functional shift to 'unwanted email')
- web + log → blog (which has spawned further new words, e.g. 'blogger', 'blogosphere')

A F Acronym Finder

The 'Acronym Finder' lists over 2,457,000 definitions in its database. Acronyms are ubiquitous in ICT (case in point). Acronyms are also a source for new words. They begin as a simple abbreviation and develop into a word with a life of its own. For example: Scuba (Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus) began as an abbreviation for a complex noun, it can now function as a verb or as an adjective, as in 'scuba diving. Laser (Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation) has back-formed a verb 'to lase', meaning to undergo laser treatment.

In electronic text messaging words are regularly clipped, converted, blended and acronyms are rife. Within ICT, Hansson and van de Bunt-Kokhuis (2004: 4) observe that there is an inherent pressure, "to communicate faster and to convey more in each message. The technology encourages abrupt and abbreviated language use".

"How, as teachers, do we cope with change? We cope by understanding it. "

A Dynamic Perspective on Grammar
(continued)

Canadian classic: "I have drank the beer."

(Continued from page 11)

Thus written language becomes highly reduced and encoded; phrases are replaced by acronyms and words are replaced by symbols and emoticons, in what Hansson and van de Bunt-Kokhuis call 'visual Esperanto' (2004: 3). In fact, more often than not, a chat room message reads as a rebus puzzle, rather than a conventional written passage.

The morphological processes I briefly introduced result in new words. Most people find these additions and changes quite interesting and don't resist them; however, fewer of us readily embrace morpho-syntactic or grammatical change.

By way of introduction to the discussion of grammatical change, I'll share an experience I had while teaching native and non-native speakers in a 'Fundamentals of English Grammar' class.

We were transforming active to passive sentences, which meant using the past participle, as for example the transformation from, "Joe ate the sandwich" to "The sandwich was eaten by Joe". The active cue "Joe drank the beer" was suggested by a student and in response not one student formed the sentence "The beer was drunk by Joe".

Each insisted that the verb MUST be 'drank'. Some were quite articulate and adamant in their insistence that 'drunk' could only be used as an adjective, as in "The drunk college student" (as opposed to 'the drunken college student').

I pointed out that, by their logic, we would use the simple past in the passive sentence, e.g. "The sandwich was ate by Joe".

Most agreed that this was not grammatical in the standard Canadian dialect. I then played what I thought was my trump card and asked would they say "I have drank the beer"? Yes, indeed they would.

By this point I was intrigued because I recognized that just such a development, the gradual shrinking and simplification of the verb paradigm, and the replacement of strong (irregular) with weak (those that follow regular patterns) forms is typical of language change. Thus, I could take the whole 'drunk' episode in my stride.

Moreover, I could muse that if my class is any indication then 'drink, drank, drunk' will go the way of 'dream, dreamt, dreamt' in North American English, which has simplified and regularized to dream, dreamed, dreamed. (Incidentally, 'swim, swam, SWUM' elicited gales of laughter.)

Having an informed perspective on language change makes it easier and more interesting to deal with.

Change is not synonymous with dissolution, if changes weren't integrated into the mainstream we would not, for example, have progressive aspect in English: 'is laughing', 'was laughing' 'will be laughing', Progressive aspect is a relatively new development. It has only come into being since the sixteenth century.

Before this, according to Baugh and Cable (1978: 291) the 'ing-form' was a noun and was preceded by the preposition

"Having an informed perspective on language change makes it easier and more interesting to deal with."

A Dynamic Perspective on Grammar
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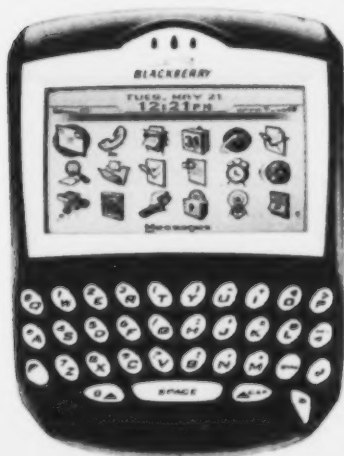
2b?Ntb?=?

'on', as in "He was on laughing" the phonological form 'on' reduced to 'a' resulting in "He was a-laughing". Eventually the 'a' prefix was dropped completely, though the archaic form is preserved in expressions such as 'she is a-waking'

This process through which the progressive arose is *grammaticalization*. It is a process by which full words undergo phonological reduction and lose their semantic and formal independence and evolve into purely grammatical forms, often becoming affixes and sometimes disappearing. Such processes occur in all languages.

The following is another example from English in which a full verb 'going' plus a preposition 'to' is reduced to a future tense form. The phrase "be going to" originally meant only physical movement toward a location.

The phrase then expanded and broadened its meaning to include intention; "be going to" came to refer to something one intended to do. With this expansion its original meaning became weakened or 'bleached'.

This semantic bleaching eventu-

ally resulted in "be going to" as future tense grammatical auxiliary form. This grammaticalized form co-exists with the full form in such expressions as "I'm going to be going home."

The grammatical form is undergoing further reduction, and we have the contracted and phonologically reduced expression "I'm gonna".

- "I am going to" toward a LOCATION" + expanding and broadening →

- "I am going to" as INTENTION + semantic bleaching →

- "I am going to" as FUTURE TENSE + phonetic reduction →

- "I'm gonna" CONTRACTED and REDUCED FORM

ICT is the perfect medium for grammaticalization because of its predilection for abbreviated forms, which result in a loss of phrase structure and/or of words. In fact there is evidence that "be going to" has grammaticalized further as seen in the example below,

- I am going to talk to you later →I'm going to talk to you later →

- Im going to talk to you later →   im gonna talk to ya later →

- gonna talk to ya later → gona ttyl → ttyl.

As grammaticalization and abbreviation processes move forward, we can end up with the logogram-like script common to chat-room texting and far from standard writing conventions.

The example above was found in the following context "lho igp gona ttyl", which translates as, "I am laughing my head off, I have got to pee, I'm going to talk to you later". (lho (laughing head off) igp (I got to pee), ttyl (talk to you later)). And it could have been reduced further to "lho igp ttyl", in which the future tense form disappears altogether.

> *"As grammaticalization and abbreviation processes move forward, we can end up with the logogram-like script common to chat-room texting and far from standard writing conventions."*

A Dynamic Perspective on Grammar (continued)

(Photo: "Pride and Prejudice" Focus Features 2005)

5SistrswntngHsbnds.NwMenIn Twn-Bingly&Darcy Fit&Loadd. BigSisJane-Fals4B,2ndSisLizH8s DCozHesProud.SlimySoljrwikam SysDHsShadypast. TrnsOutHe-sActulyARlyNysGuy&RlyFancysLiz.SheDecydsSheLyksHim.Evry1GtsMaryd.

This much clipped and abbreviated style of writing is not confined to the fringes of chat-room communication. It is now being introduced into literary and academic forums.

The Guardian (Nov. 17, 2005) stated that, "Some of the most complicated and wordy works of English literature are being compressed into the jerky speed-writing of text messages."

The article notes that, "The service is being launched by the student phone service *dot mobile*, with heavyweight backing from John Sutherland, the Lord Northcliffe professor emeritus of English literature at University College London".

According to Prof Sutherland, "texting was an underused but promising educational resource" and he suggests that salient passages to quote in exams be transcribed into ICT, as for example Hamlet's soliloquy, "2b?Ntb?=? "

Sutherland is quoted as saying, "Take the dot mobile ending to *Jane Eyre* for example - MadwyfSetsFyr2Haus - was ever a climax better compressed?" If, as the article predicts, 'texting' becomes part of the national curriculum, we can expect to see synopses, such as the one suggested for Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

5SistrswntngHsbnds.NwMenIn Twn-Bingly&Darcy Fit&Loadd. BigSis-JaneFals4B,2ndSisLizH8s DCoz-HesProud.SlimySoljrwikam SysDHsShadypast. TrnsOutHesActu-lyARlyNysGuy&RlyFancysLiz.SheDec ydsSheLyksHim.Evry1GtsMaryd.

In sum, the medium, that is ubiquitous e-mail and chat-room communication conducted in English on a global level, is changing the way we write language and, in doing so, it is changing the standard. If

"MadwyfSetsFyr2Haus - was ever a climax better compressed?"

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1. The translation runs as follows: "Five sisters wanting husbands. There are two new men in town - Bingley and Darcy. They are handsome and wealthy. Big sister Jane falls for Bingley, but second sister Elizabeth hates Darcy because he is proud. Slimy soldier Wickham says Darcy has a shady past. It turns out that he's actually a really nice guy and really fancies Elizabeth. She decides that she likes him. Everyone gets married."

A Dynamic Perspective on Grammar
(continued)

we teach our ESL/EFL students only a strict standard, we do them a disservice.

Language learners need to know the standard; but they also need to be able to negotiate the variety.

David Crystal (1999: 4) admonishes teachers to: "replace any static conception we may have of language by a dynamic one.... A static view ignores the existence of change, tries to hide it from the student, and presents students with a frozen or fossilized view of language."

Teachers and their students need to be aware of language change and variation within our own dialect and between dialects. In the classroom, teachers should support openness and awareness of change and variation.

Crystal (1999: 4), advises teachers to: "hold a mirror up to (linguistic) nature - to let students see something of the organized chaos which is out there... Trying to protect students from it, by pretending it isn't there, does no-one any service."

He concludes, "I do not accept the conventional wisdom that students will be 'confused' by being told about both. Contrariwise, I do believe that to distort reality, by pretending that the variation does not exist, is to introduce a level of artifice which brings difficulties sooner or later."

Change and variation cannot be ignored or resisted, but should be acknowledged and even accepted. If we teach abroad, we will encounter different standards of English; moreover, we will encounter a variety of purposes for learning English. Students are often learning English not in order to interact with native speakers; more often English is being learned as a *lingua franca* for use between non-native speakers.

The goal, then, is not native-like proficiency; thus, there is no sense 'beating students up' with rigorous adherence to a distant standard.

Likewise, if we teach in North America we will undoubtedly teach the local standard; but we will encounter speakers of other varieties of English, as will our students.

In the classroom, we may, as Crystal suggests (1999: 4), filter variation to some degree, particularly at more introductory levels, "so that students are not dazzled by the spectrum of alternatives", but we cannot and should not deny the diversity which results from change, nor should we adhere to rigid conservative prescriptivism.

Awareness of linguistic process of change and the variation resulting from change goes a long way toward helping teachers and students navigate variation.

Awareness begins with teachers; it is our responsibility to understand the nature of language change and the variation.

If we understand, we can approach change and variation positively and better help new speakers of English to cope and make effective language choices. I have outlined practical objectives for teachers below:

- Understand the nature of language change

- Explore language contact issues personally and in the classroom

- Acknowledge and explore language variants personally and in the classroom

- Assist students to master the local standard

- Advocate a positive attitude toward non-standard variation

In conclusion, language is constantly evolving due to internal and external forces; resulting in linguistic variation. Furthermore, the rate of language change is accelerated because of greater contact allowed by ICT. ICT is itself a force for change.

Change is not synonymous with deterioration or decay, it is a fact of language life; thus there is little point in hun-

"English is being learned as a lingua franca for use between non-native speakers. "

A Dynamic Perspective on Grammar (continued)

kering-down and resisting it, or, like Fowler, condemning speakers of non-standard English to the 'grammarless caverns'.

As teachers, we should have a positive perspective on language change and variation.

We can achieve this by increasing our knowledge of the processes and path-ways of language of change.

The more we understand, the better able we are to accept and acknowledge linguistic change, and the better able we will be to introduce our students to the evolving standard and language variants which they will inevitably meet. ❖

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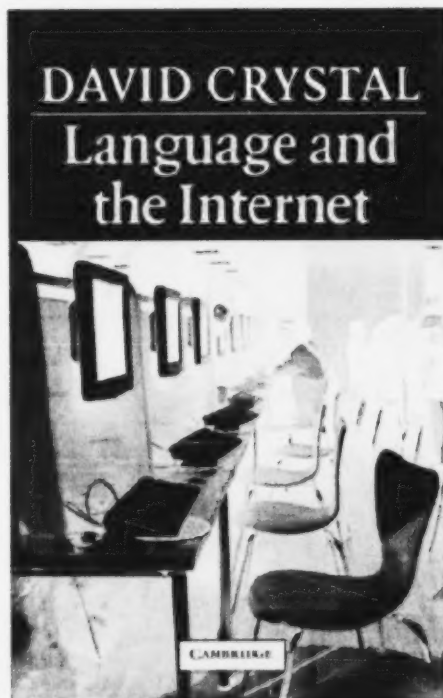McArthur, Tom. *The Oxford Guide to World English*. Oxford: University Press, 2002.

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BOOK PROFILE:
Language and the Internet

For most of us, the term 'Internet' has been transformed from a vague concept into a daily presence in our lives. From little more than an amusing plaything for computer geeks a mere decade ago, its audience has become international almost overnight, its users spanning all ages. Astonishingly, in some aspects of human communication, e-mail for example, the Internet has almost entirely replaced every other conventional form of correspondence.

Not only that, for millions of people the world wide web is the first – if not the *only* – destination for all types of inquiry. The phrase "Google it" has in fact displaced the historical invocation to 'look it up in the library."

For many, the Internet has also become a primary source of entertainment, social interaction, commerce, education and propaganda. In short, as some have pointed out, the Internet represents a communications revolution.

In *Language and the Internet*, British educator and writer David Crystal, provides insights into the impact that this revolution has had, and continues to have, on language.

Contrary to the widely-held notion that the Internet is a 'disaster area' for language, Crystal argues that the medium in fact enables a remarkable expansion in both the range and the variety of language and that it is providing unprecedented new opportunities for personal creativity in language use.

In eight clearly-organized and readable chapters, Crystal explores themes such as:

- the phenomenon of language use for intimate and even creative communicative purposes in internet chat rooms, e-mail, and in 'virtual' worlds

> *"In some aspects of human communication, e-mail for example, the Internet has almost entirely replaced every other conventional form of correspondence."*

BOOK PROFILE:
Language and the Internet (continued)
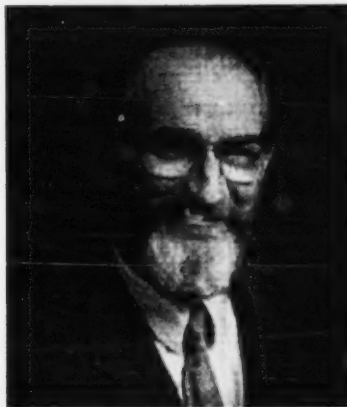
Prof. David Crystal
(Photo: University of Wales, Bangor)

- the languages of the world wide web

- new terms that have sprung from electronic communications media and come into everyday use; terms such as, 'trolling', 'data mining', 'cyberspace', 'e-commerce', 'texting', 'flaming'.

- the fluidity of conventions in this still-emerging medium: how we use (or misuse, depending on your personal stance) punctuation; the graphic symbols we call emoticons used to communicate personal feelings (the 'smiley' ☺, for instance]; page and layout formats; personal

greetings; acronyms (such as IMHO = in my humble opinion), and leave-takings (CUL8R = See you later).

- what may happen to language in general and to specific languages in the future as an outcome of this communications revolution

Crystal asserts that what is sometimes referred to as 'netspeak' is no passing fad; in fact, it is a radical transformation in our language, here to stay, and something that we – and especially we teachers – cannot ignore. Packed with examples and analyses of actual usage, *Language and the Internet* raises provocative questions about the future of the way we communicate, accessible to anyone who has used the Internet and has an interest in language issues. ❖

Book contents:

1. A linguistic perspective

2. The medium of Netspeak

3. Finding an identity

4. The language of e-mail

5. The language of chatgroups

6. The language of virtual worlds

7. The language of the Web

8. The future of the Internet.

With author and subject indexes and charts.

"Language and the Internet raises provocative questions about the future of the way we communicate..."

The flavour of the book

"There is of course nothing new about fears accompanying the emergence of a new communications technology. In the fifteenth century, the arrival of printing was widely perceived by the Church as an invention of Satan, the hierarchy fearing that the dissemination of uncensored ideas would lead to a breakdown of social order and put innumerable souls at risk of damnation.... Around 400 years later, similar concerns.... were interspersed when society began to cope with the political consequences of the arrival of the telegraph, the telephone and broadcasting technology. The telegraph would destroy the family and promote crime. The telephone would undermine society."

Teaching English as a Second Language in China

By Zulfikar Mulji

Harbin, in northeast China, has an urban population of about 3.4 million

Capilano College International Higher Education (CCIHE) of North Vancouver hired me as an independent contractor for the position of Language Instructor at Harbin University of Science and Technology in the People's Republic of China.

The two institutions are in a partnership, with Capilano College offering a two-year Diploma Program at the Chinese university. I was to provide English language instruction to Chinese students enrolled in the Business Program, prior to the students' commencing their Business courses.

The middle and high school education systems in the People's Republic of China are increasingly offering courses in English. The experiences that I describe here come from a five-month teaching sojourn in the province of Heilongjiang in 2005.

The English language is taught in both middle and high schools in China at present, with strong emphasis on memorization for the acquisition of all four skill areas. From my observations, however, it appeared that teachers had typically paid little attention to, and offered even less practice in, the functional, communicative application of those language skills in actual use.

It also became clear that the assessment procedures being used were based on tests consisting mainly of true/false items, multiple choice question/answers, and fill-in-the-blanks completions. This approach seemed to me to further deflect attention away from 'real language' interactions. Moreover, it also seemed to thwart students' own creative and analytical uses of language to satisfy any personal communicative needs they may have felt.

Students entering the ESL program at the University in Heilongjiang, where I taught, tended to score very high marks for vocabulary and grammar in assessment tests, but did rather less well in the writing and comprehension aspects.

I concluded from these observations, then, that as an ESL teacher at the university level I had to make some attempt to wean my students off their accustomed study habits and nudge them towards lan-

> *"...it appeared that teachers had typically paid little attention to, and offered even less practice in, the functional, communicative application of...language skills in actual use."*

Teaching English as a Second Language in China (continued)

Students, September 2005

"There is tremendous pressure on every student to perform well."

guage learning efforts that would help them to generate more of their own language to do 'real' tasks.

Culturally, Chinese students are typically very deferential to university teachers, and rarely initiate communication. But after some encouragement, some of my students began to open up, and even offer their impressions about the whole language learning process – what helped and what didn't - and the differences between Mandarin and English that they saw as critical in helping them to learn.

One student, for example, remarked to me that she could talk in her language with her mouth hardly open at all. The Mandarin language is a tonal language, and as such does not place the same emphasis as English on the places and manner of articulation. This knowledge proved helpful, not only to me as a teacher, but to my students as well, especially in pronunciation classes. I began to tailor my curriculum to include considerable activity in helping them to learn the basic manner and place of articulation for English vowel and consonant sounds, to hear and reproduce correct syllable emphasis and develop some facility with good intonation.

When we look at cultural issues that affect the teaching-learning situation in China, we must remember that most students are in school for fourteen hours a day, six days a week.

There is tremendous pressure on every student to perform well. The People's Republic of China has had a one-child per family policy in place for almost thirty years, and this places an additional burden on individual students to succeed in school. There are usually no brothers or sisters to diffuse the attentions of the parents, for example.

I also noted that parents appeared to treat their children with great indulgence (the term 'princess' and 'little prince' have often been used to describe

Teaching English as a Second Language in China (continued)

(Continued from page 20)

the situation) as a result of the one child social policy. The parents work extremely hard, and must pay an equivalent of five thousand dollars Canadian, per year, for their sons and daughters to attend Harbin University of Science and Technology. The course is a three-year diploma program. At present, most Chinese families are hard pressed to come up with that kind of money; it's a truly staggering sum for them. In addition, couples are usually expected to support their aged family in-laws.

One feature of the one-child policy that I also observed is that there appeared to be much closeness amongst the boys and girls – and identification with 'the group' was evident. I detected, for example, little evidence of the socially isolated student.

Interestingly, at the start of term in the ESL Beginners Program, I noticed a general tendency amongst the boys to skip classes. In discussions with colleagues I discovered that for many of the boys this was their first time away from home, and they took their entry into uni-

versity as an opportunity to explore to its fullest the heady freedom of being away from their watchful parents' supervision. Most nights they could be found playing video games on their computers into the wee hours of the morning. While I was in China, the government even officially identified this practice as quite worrisome.

And just as interesting to me was that most students identified sleeping as one of their 'hobbies', when asked about what they liked to do in their spare time. In high school, they had had little time for sleep, but here at the university they were determined to take full advantage of the opportunity to sleep in.

However, the novelty of this freedom quickly wore off, and by the end of the first term, there was a marked improvement in their class attendance.

This habit was not prevalent amongst the girls, however, with the result that more girls advanced onto higher ESL levels than boys.

Harbin University has a ten o'clock

"Harbin University has a ten o'clock curfew policy every night."

Teaching English as a Second Language in China (continued)

(Continued from page 21)

curfew policy every night. Lights are switched off and doors locked, even on weekends! One Saturday night, as I lingered over cups of green tea at a coffee house on campus, we were asked to hurry up as the café was about to close its doors. Questioning the students about this, I was told that it was not only the issue of saving on electricity (there is no power in the students' rooms either), but also to ensure that students were not out late at night creating a disturbance.

On the surface, Chinese university students look like university students in Canada. They dress in the same fashions, and as well. And I must say that there was not a single incident where I was treated with disrespect. Everywhere I experienced the utmost respect and kindness and was often given help. There is one remarkable value that every Chinese student seems to have and that is respect for elders and parents.

In class, on the other hand, the students were extremely passive. This can be attributed, I believe, not only to shyness, but is probably also related to the political and social culture, in which respect for elders is the social norm and younger persons are accustomed to listen rather than speak up. A typical Chinese classroom, for example, will have the instructor deliver a lecture, and the student will only participate if asked a question directly. Canadian-trained ESL instructors often find Chinese students' passivity quite a challenge, and have to work hard, as I did, to find ways to promote interaction.

ESL teachers new to China will also quickly discover that they must not discuss either religion or politics in the classroom. If the course requires a discussion to take place, teachers must also refrain from giving personal opinions, and try to be objective when contentious issues arise. Discussions about culture need to be centred as much as possible on comparing differences and similarities, rather than on making value judgments.

Instructional Issues in Grammar, Reading, Writing and Vocabulary

Grammar and Writing are introduced as separate skills, starting at Level 5 and continuing up to Level 7. For clarity, I should point out that in the Beginning Reading and Vocabulary classes in Harbin, Level 5 is roughly equivalent to Canadian Language Benchmark level 6 and Level 7 roughly equates to CLB level 9. The student may then enroll in the Business Program proper.

The textbooks used for studying grammar, writing, reading and vocabulary include the *Mosaic* series by Brenda Wegman and Miki Knezevic, *English Vocabulary in Use* (Intermediate) by Michael McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell, *Up Close – English for Global Communications* by Anna Uhl Chamot et al, *Refining Composition Skills* by Regina L. Smalley et al., *Blueprints Composition Skills for Academic Writing* by K. Folse et al., and *Fundamentals of English Grammar* by Betty Azar

Most Chinese students have great difficulty in making correct use of prepositions, tenses, and articles. Interestingly, they do not view plagiarism as a serious misdemeanour as we do in the west; instead, they view copying as practical!

"Canadian-trained ESL instructors often find Chinese students' passivity quite a challenge..."

Teaching English as a Second Language in China (continued)

When requested to write sentences using new vocabulary, for example, they most often simply copied them from a textbook, a dictionary or the internet, with the dictionary being the most popular source, probably owing to its 'authoritative' status. One solution to this practice that seemed to work for me was to insist that students try writing an original sentence with the new word, accompanied by a synonym in the same sentence.

This technique also appeared to help them understand the meanings of new words more clearly.

In their attempts to write, most students continued to have difficulty with sentence structure; thinking in Mandarin and then writing in English often resulted in verbs, prepositions and articles in the wrong position in the sentence. But overall, with repeated practice and feedback, their efforts improved; the five-word sentence gave way to longer sentences, plagiarism decreased, and a lot of creativity began to emerge.

Here are some typical examples of their development. HW 2 means the 'second homework assignment', HW 3 means the 'third homework assignment' and so on.

Student A

New word: endless – we don't have endless natural resources. One day in the future the natural resources will dry up. (Homework Assignment2)

elect: we elected him as our monitor. (HW2)

snap: It is a snap. You can do it by yourself. It is an easy job. (HW3)

prematurely: I want he to premature education, but his sister tells me it is to early he just a baby. (HW3)

liberated: now women are liberated. They are free. They are equality between men and women. (HW4)

well-to-do: she is a well-to-do person. She can buy any things she wants because her husband is a rich man. (HW4)

homemaker: my mother is a homemaker. She doses much housework. (HW5)

job sharing: Mary and john have job sharing. They are a married couple. They need to take care for their little baby so Mary is working at morning. John is working at afternoon. (HW5)

Student B

endless: I've had enough of their endless arguing. (HW2)

elect: She become the first woman to be elected. (HW2)

snap: done, made, etc. quickly and with little was or warning (HW3)

liberated: The women who are liberated don't want to have child after they get married in China (HW4)

well-to-do: The man who lives next to me is very well-to-do. (HW4)

homemaker: The most women are homemaker in the past, but they're all work outside now, they don't only work at home. (HW5)

job sharing: Jack and I do this job together, it's our own job sharing. (HW5)

Student C

endless: The money of spending seemed endless. (HW2)

elected: They elected a new monitor. (HW2)

snap: This job's a snap. I only use 10 minutes finish it. It's a piece of cake. (HW3)

prematurely: My young sister was born prematurely. She was four weeks premature. (HW3)

"...most students continued to have difficulty with sentence structure; thinking in Mandarin and then writing in English..."

Teaching English as a Second Language in China (continued)

(Continued from page 22)

liberated: She is a liberated woman. She doesn't have traditional ideas about social sexual. (HW4)

well-to-do: Anna has a well-to-do family. She has a lot of money to spend. (HW4)

homemaker: My grandmother is a typical homemaker, she is a professional housewife. (HW5)

job sharing: You can work job-sharing. You can find another person to share the hours of work and the pay of one job. (HW5)

When asked to reflect on their learning, their notes, journal and e-mails often contained insights like the following:

I will still use your mothed [method] to stady [study] hard. I always have big pressure right now, especially this term. Because I do not know what could I do in the future, and i feel a little bit difficult on studying English. Time run fast, and i have many things that i should learn, so i feel a little perplexed.

You may have noticed that by the fourth homework assignment, HW4, one student was able to use a synonym or a group of words to explain the meaning of the new word in a sentence.

Instructional Issues in Pronunciation, Listening and Speaking

Listening and Speaking are introduced as separate skill sets, starting at Level 6 and continuing onto Level 7.

The Chinese students that I taught, had most of the following challenges in trying to improve their pronunciation of English:

- sounding the voiceless consonants /p/, /t/ and /k/ in words that are in final sentence position. For example,

the word 'beat' may sound like 'bee'; 'stop' may sound like 'stoh', 'tack' may sound like 'tah'.

- voiced versus unvoiced consonants in words that are in final sentence position. For example, /b/, /d/, /g/, versus /p/, /t/, /k/. 'Cab' often becomes 'cap'; 'bad' often becomes 'bat', and 'bag' becomes 'back'.

- voiced and voiceless fricatives. Chinese students tended to confuse /v/ with /f/ and /z/ with /s/. For example, 'live' was usually rendered as 'life', and 'fuzz' became 'fuss'.

- initial words starting with /r/, /w/, and /l/. For example, 'lorry/ became 'rorry', 'roll' became 'loll'.

- initial words starting with /v/ usually came out using /w/; for example, 'vent' became 'went' or 'vine' became 'wine'.

- specific words such as 'fire', 'wire', 'sire' and 'dire' were particularly difficult. The vowel sound /i/ was pronounced more like iin between /ey/ and /ay/. The words above often came out as 'fayr', 'wayr', 'sayr' and 'dayr'.

- the word 'usually' gave particular problems. Difficulty with the sound of letter 's' after the letter 'u', with the sound as in the word 'beige'.

I found that repeated practice and constructive feedback was required before any significant improvement appeared. Moreover, lessons and classroom charts that demonstrated phonetic symbols, and instructional episodes with a focus on vowel and consonant sounds, bilabial sounds, labiodentals, interdentals, alveolars, alveo-palatals, velar sounds, fricatives, affricates and nasal sounds gave them a systematic reference to work with.

"Seek knowledge, even if you have to go to China."

Teaching English as a Second Language in China (continued)

In addition, I discovered that only after these pronunciation issues had been internalized, could they move on to tackle intonation and stress more productively.

Personal Reflections

As I recalled my teaching sojourn in China, I was reminded of the age-old saying: Seek knowledge, even if you have to go to China.

The Chinese climate is continental. It has a huge land mass, with mountains to the west and southwest, a mix of tundra, temperate zones and desert to the north, oceans and seas to the east, and a rich agricultural area in the southeast.

It is a fascinating country, rich in history, with many firsts such as paper and gunpowder. Its varied topography is often spectacular and its cultural diversity gives it vitality. My visits to Wulumuqi, Kashgar and Tashkorgan in Xinjiang, western China are forever etched in my memory. Historically, these areas were part of the famed 'Silk Road'.

Chinese society is in transition. From a western perspective, the religious repression is not as severe as it was, although new movements are restricted from making public demonstration of their practices. The older, established cultural faiths are now being recognized politically, albeit slowly.

There is little or no personal privacy as we know it here in the west. Many a time I became aware that my correspondence had been looked at, the apartment visited when I was not in, and that every time I went out I was followed. I was told that this surveillance was commonplace, and even though it was annoying, I grew accustomed to it.

"There is little or no personal privacy as we know it here in the west."

Teaching English as a Second Language in China (continued)

(Continued from page 25)

By the time I left I did not even think about it. However, I often questioned the need for such intrusions.

My misgivings were allayed somewhat, however, when I observed that Chinese citizens were also subject to the same surveillance.

It seemed obvious to me that the price for developing a capitalist and somewhat 'laissez-faire' economy implies an opening up to the rest of the world, that extreme social control is counterproductive in the modern context.

I left China, however, anything but pessimistic. I feel that education, in general, is like a lantern; it illuminates the dark corners of human existence. And so it will do in China, a pluralistic society. In fact, relaxation of controls and acknowledgment of the value of a more open society will contribute to the greater stability, prosperity and unity of the country. It will also serve to diminish prejudice, and transform the faraway autonomous provinces into more active social participants.

My experiences in China were overwhelmingly positive. In Harbin I met people, young and old, who helped me at every turn. I also found individuals and entrepreneurs quite aggressive and I attributed this to my being a foreigner; the prices of things varied, it seemed, from one day to the next.

Most of my students at the university came from towns and villages outside Harbin, and therefore had had little or no exposure to foreigners, let alone someone of Indian origin from Canada who spoke English with a North American accent.

I loved the open vegetable markets, and my diet changed as I stopped eating red meat. I have no intestinal/digestive problems, as I washed vegetables well, and even though the cost of the food was very low, I cooked my own meals at the university-provided apartment on campus.

I had no discomfort in traveling on public buses and shopping at local markets and stores. One common practice that I did abhor, however, was the habit of public spitting – in classrooms, restaurants, and indeed in most public places. I was also dismayed at the amount of smoking.

China has a high mortality rate from smoking-induced lung cancer, and I expected to see more and firmer government action against smoking.

I took it upon myself to have my students create anti-smoking posters and have them posted in corridors and classrooms, but to no avail. In fact, the permanent university staff was full of chain smokers!

In general, I found the students like sponges; they soaked up any help they could get to improve not only their own lot but to bring their country into alignment with the rest of the world. I am hoping, therefore, to be able to return as an ESL instructor to China in the future, to pursue at the same time the noble traditions of teaching and seeking knowledge. ❖

"One common practice that I did abhor, however, was the habit of public spitting ..."

BOOK REVIEW:

The Swallows of Kabul

Review by Clayton Graves

It is said that for centuries swallows decorated the skies above Kabul, Afghanistan's ancient capital city, swooping and darting in graceful circles, joyously twittering and chirping in social groups, mirroring the busy and prosperous society beneath.

All that ended with the Soviet invasion and occupation of the country, beginning in 1979. And as the ensuing 10-year internecine struggle raged between the communists and the nationalist *Mujahideen* insurgents, the swallows of Kabul departed. Where they went, no one really knew.

What the graceful birds left behind was a sorrowful scene, dominated by violence, destruction, and inhumanity on a scale difficult to fathom. Their flight also marked the desecration of a city long renowned as a glorious and fertile place, with prosperous boulevards, a rich, exciting culture, and famed for the beauty and grace of its veiled women.

The Swallows of Kabul by Algerian writer Yasmina Khadra, is a searing and grim tale of two married couples in Kabul, and the intersection of their lives in the decade after the Russians abandoned Afghanistan to the chaos of competing provincial warlords, the anti-Soviet *Mujahideen*, and the repressively fundamentalist Taliban.

Yasmina Khadra is actually the *nom de plume* taken by novelist Mohammed Moulessehoul, an Algerian army officer. He adopted his wife's name to avoid both censorship and punishment in his
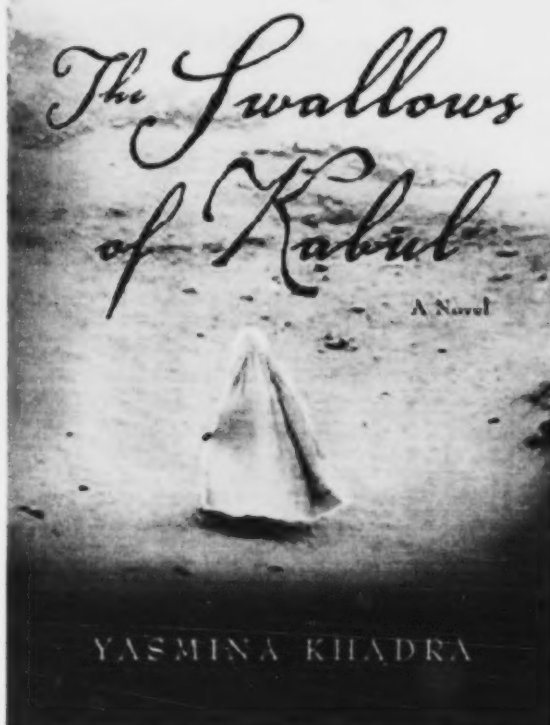
Yasmina Khadra, translated by John Cullen
Anchor paperback 2005, 195 pages

> *"This is not a good-news story. In fact, the novel begins and ends with executions."*

homeland, before moving to France, where he continues to live and write.

Like Siddiq Barmak's gripping film *Osama* (2003), *The Swallows of Kabul* depicts the horrors of post-Soviet life in

The Swallows of Kabul (continued)

Mohammed Moulessehoul, a.k.a. Yasmina Khadra

(Photo: Salon du Livre)

"The story moves quickly and inexorably to its abysmal conclusion..."

trays a few weeks in the desperate and fractured lives of Atiq Shautak, a former *Mujahideen* fighter, who is now a jailor, and his terminally-ill wife Musarrat. Atiq is losing his grip on reality and has abandoned both pity and hope, aimlessly wandering the city streets, wielding his whip in furious fits of despair.

His working life is spent guarding condemned prisoners who will soon be taken to the city's outdoor stadium and executed publicly.

The other – and younger - couple, Mohsen Ramat and his wife Zunaira, came from the privileged class of Kabul's wealthy merchant families.

The rise of the Taliban in the 1990s, however, dashed their hopes and plans, drove them from their positions in society and left them isolated, impoverished and dispirited.

Mohsen's dreamy idealism was no match for the fanatical brutality of the Taliban, and like Atiq the jailor he now wanders Kabul's decaying city streets, unsure what to do, how to think, how to recapture his life. Zunaira, proud and intelligent, has refused to don the humiliating *burqa*, and finds herself exiled in her own home, seething with anger.

The secondary characters in the novel, friends and acquaintances of the two couples, represent the moral divide of the chaotic Afghan society. On one side are the opportunistic functionaries of the extremist Taliban regime; on the other are the de-

Afghanistan as the country hurtled catastrophically into a nightmare of brutal repression and human degradation, especially of women.

This is not a good-news story. In fact, the novel begins and ends with executions. It is a tragic and moving tale, operatic in scope and poetic in style. But therein lies its power to engage us.

The spellbinding narrative por-

The Swallows of Kabul (continued)

feated victims of the fundamentalist zealots' reign of terror.

Events too extreme to imagine in any other world but this one bring the two couples together, shattering what little was left of their love and respect. The turn of events is both shocking and gripping as the characters find themselves in a futile battle to maintain their humanity against the forces of futility and horror.

When Zunaira gives in to her husband's repeated urgings to don the *burqa* and go out into the streets for a walk, their innocent laughter is chastised by Taliban goons who force Mohsen into a mosque for hours, leaving Zunaira publicly disgraced. It is this final humiliation, coupled with an inexorable sense of despair, that erupts into domestic violence in a scene that turns the tables on our expectations, and results in Zunaira's imprisonment in Atiq's jail, awaiting her fate.

The story moves quickly and inexorably to its abysmal conclusion, leaving the reader breathless and slightly dazed. The author's language is filled with poetic and deeply moving images, exploring the inner turmoil of the characters, rhythmically moving back and forth between reflection and action, laying bare their tortured souls.

So, why should ESL teachers read *The Swallows of Kabul?* What is its significance for us? Well, for one thing, we have many students from Afghanistan in our classes, both adults and children, some of whom have distinct memories of life in Kabul in the late 1990s. Many of them know stories like this, but first-hand.

This tale is also a window into events of recent history in Afghanistan, where Canadian soldiers even now are working, fighting and dying, as they try to quash the resurgent forces of the very same Taliban (aided by the terrorist al- Qaeda faction) who play such a central role in this novel. Indeed, the story warns us of what the future could very well hold for that beleaguered country.

Finally, for us ESL teachers who are novel readers, the image-filled, poetic style of Yasmina Khadra the storyteller helps to renew our faith in the power of narrative – in fact, the power of language – when it is artfully used, to touch the human heart, helping us to understand the experience of others, sharing what it means to be human. ⋄

"...the story warns us of what the future could very well hold for that beleaguered country... "

The flavour of the book

Her [Zunaira's] face pales, and for the first time her eyes, as they grow wider, lose most of their brilliance. "You stoned a woman?"

"I even think I hit her on the head."

"Mohsen, come on, you couldn't have done such a thing. That's not your way - you're an educated man."

"I don't know what came over me. It happened so fast. It was as if the crowd put a spell on me. I don't recall gathering up the stones. I only remember that I couldn't get rid of them, and an irresistible rage seemed to come into my arm.... What frightens me and saddens me at the same time is that I didn't even try to resist."

Zunaira stands up like one who has been knocked flat but then rises again to her feet. Weakly. Incredulous, but without anger. Her lips, which a moment ago were lush and full, have dried up. She feels around for support, finds only the end of a horizontal beam that juts out from the wall, and holds on tight. For a long time, she remains still, waiting to regain her senses, but in vain. Mohsen tries to take her hand again; she eludes him and staggers toward the kitchen amid the gentle rustling of her dress. The instant she disappears behind the curtain, Mohsen understands that he should not have confided to his wife what he now refuses to admit to himself.

BOOK REVIEW:

Eats, Shoots & Leaves

Review by Nan Doe

Once upon a time a panda walked into a café, sat down and ordered fish and chips. Ten minutes later he ate his supper, took out a handgun and shot twice into the air, then started to walk out. The café owner shouted, "Hey, what's going on?" The panda handed the owner a poorly-edited wildlife manual, with the words, "I'm a panda. You figure it out." Of course, the owner immediately found the appropriate entry in the manual. It read: "Panda. Black and white mammal. Eats, shoots & leaves."

This story is the rationale given for the title of this wonderful – and very amusing – book. At least for me it was wonderful, and for my daughter who has my genes as a language stickler. My son-in-law, on the other hand, would beg to differ. He is a one-time Scrabble champion, and the current Canadian champion (I say this not only to brag a little, but also to point out that he is no slouch in the spelling department.) He can appreciate the humour in the book and the cleverness of the writing, but he just doesn't get it in the same way we do. He doesn't have prejudices for or against certain uses of the apostrophe, the comma, the colon, and all the other little marks that make such a differ-

"Eats, Shoots & Leaves" by Lynne Truss
Penguin (Gotham Books paperback) 2003

ence, sometimes to the meaning, sometimes to the flow of a piece of writing.

He did not want to shout 'Yes!' in a self-affirmed way every second page, as we did. He just commented laconically, "Yeah, but so what? What's the big deal?" (Obviously a genetic aberration.)

Eats, Shoots & Leaves (continued)

Lynne Truss
(Photo: University of Brighton)

(Continued from page 30)

So, if you're a language stickler - and what self-respecting ESL teacher isn't - you'll love this book and want to read it aloud to everybody within earshot. But if you're not, you should read it anyway. You'll pick up more than a few serious tips to improve your writing, and have quite a few quiet chuckles to boot.

The sub-title of this book – "The Zero-Tolerance Approach to Punctuation" –proves that it's not just another run-of-the-mill self-help language catechism. Believe it or not, it is *totally* focused on punctuation. To quote its author, Lynne Truss, "I discovered to my horror that most (British) people do not know their apostrophe from their elbow".

She points out in the preface that there are actually people in this world who care enough about punctuation they can't hold themselves back from jumping into the fray and correcting everything in sight. (I share the feeling.) Unfortunately, as Truss points out, these people are generally not well-liked: "In short, we are unattractive, know-all obsessives who get things out of proportion and are in continual peril of being disowned by our exasperated families."

To demonstrate the flavour of the writing style in this little 210-page book, I'll quote from the chapter on 'the versatile apostrophe:'

> One might dare to say that while the period (or full stop) is the lumpen male of the punctuation world (do one job at a time; do it well, forget about it instantly), the apostrophe is the frantically multi-tasking female, dotting hither and yon, and succumbing to burn-out from all the thankless effort.

With regard to the comma, she states that there are really only two distinct functions:

1. To illuminate the grammar of a sentence.

2. To point up – rather in the manner of musical notation – such literary qualities as rhythm, direction, pitch, tone and flow.

In general, she asserts, "on the page, punctuation performs its grammatical functions, but in the mind of the reader it does more than that. It tells the reader how to hum the tune."

Ms. Truss also addresses the way in which e-mail has affected the way people are now writing. "Is it an option," she asks, "to cling on to the punctuation and grammar we know and love?" Apparently a news story which appeared in *The Washington*

"...we are unattractive, know-all obsessives who get things out of proportion and are in continual peril of being disowned... "

Eats, Shoots & Leaves (continued)

Post in 1999 gave her hope. It was about a new service that was spreading throughout the internet – the 'Strunkenwhite'* virus – that refused to deliver e-mails containing errors in grammar and punctuation. Hurrah!

But, dear ESL colleagues, you'll just have to get your own copy of *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* to discover the ending of that story.

*The 'Strunkenwhite' virus refers to *The Elements of Style*, that 'little bible of how to write correct and effective English', by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White (yes, he of *Charlotte's Web* fame). First published in 1935, it remains in print and available today. It should be on every English teacher's bookshelf. ❖

Excerpt

The flavour of the text

"You will know all about emoticons. Emoticons are the proper name for smileys. And a smiley is, famously, this:

:-)

Forget the idea of selecting the right words in the right order and channeling the readers' attention by means of artful pointing. Just add the right emoticon to your email and everyone will know what self-expressive effect you thought you kind-of had in mind. Anyone interested in punctuation has a dual reason to feel aggrieved about smileys, because not only are they a paltry substitute for expressing oneself properly; they are also designed by people who evidently thought the punctuation marks on the standard keyboard cried out for an ornamental function. What's this dot-on-top-of-a dot thing for? What earthly good is it? Well, if you look at it sideways, it could be a pair of eyes. What's this curvy thing for? It's a mouth, look! Hey, I think we're onto something.

:-(

Now it's sad!

;-)

It looks like it's winking!

:-r

It looks like it's sticking its tongue out! The permutations may be endless:

:~/ mixed up!

<:- dunce!

:-[pouting!

;-O surprise!

Well, that's enough. I've just spotted a third reason to loathe emoticons, which is that when they pass from fashion (and I do hope they already have), future generations will associate punctuation marks with an outmoded and rather primitive graphic pastime and despise them all the more. "Why do they still have all these keys with things like dots and spots and eyes and mouths and things?" they will grumble. "Nobody does smileys any more."

The challenges of preparing a One-Size-Fits-All test

By Robert Courchêne,

Second Language Institute, University of Ottawa

In 2002, I was asked to take over a project funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) for the production of the French version of the *Canadian Language Benchmarks* 2000 (CLB 2000) and the development of a Streamlined Placement Test for use with the Cours de langue pour les immigrants au Canada (CLIC programmes, the equivalent of LINC in English). As the project was already months behind schedule, CIC was anxious to have the material produced as quickly as possible as there were rumblings in the Canadian Parliament about the fact that, while the CLB and supporting documents existed in English, there were no equivalents in French.

To meet the demands of CIC it was decided, with their approval, that the *Standards linguistiques canadiens* (SLC) would be a translation/adaptation of the CLB 2000 with the inclusion of examples specific to French. Raymond LeBlanc, who was responsible for this project, had access to the feedback that had been gathered in Focus Groups held in Moncton, Winnipeg and Ottawa as well as the *Niveaux de compétence* developed for Québec. The SLC were delivered to CIC in June of 2002. (See Appendix 1 for a list of the materials developed for this project). After being reviewed by a number of experts, including a specialist hired by CIC, the document was launched at a Citizenship Ceremony held at the University of Ottawa in January of 2003.[2]

Once the SLC were developed, the testing team at the Second Language Institute (SLI) at the University of Ottawa set about developing a placement test for the four skill areas[3] to cover the competencies included in SLC 1 to 8. As we had already developed a large number of tests for different clientele, academically-focused for the most part, we adopted the same approach that had worked well for us in the past. In what follows, I will describe how this approach had not only to be adapted, but, in some cases abandoned, to meet the needs of the diverse clientele found with the CLIC programme.

Listening Comprehension
(Compréhension de l'oral)

Diagnostic Test

Based on the SLC, the testing team produced nearly 40 subtests including ten focussing on sound discrimination (e.g., *Louis/lui, roue/rue*) and numeracy (recognition of numbers from 1 to 1000). As the testing team (TT) felt that such subtests would better be grouped within a *Test diagnostique*, they were removed from the subtest bank and put together into a testing format to be used for diagnostic purposes. The test was field tested on three different occasions with clientele at all levels of French as a Second Language (FLS). Based on the nearly 500 candidates tested, the test was shelved as it did not discriminate among students at the elementary and advanced levels. In addition, two of the subtests proved to be too difficult for all the candidates involved. As this test was not one of the deliverables, shelving it and/or confining it to in-house use was not a difficult decision to make.

The remaining subtests were grouped into two Versions (A and B) that were first piloted with the large range of FLS classes (approximately [is there a num-

"...the test was shelved as it did not discriminate among students at the elementary and advanced levels."

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1. In this article I report on a project that was carried out by a Team from the Second Language Institute.

2. The SLC is currently under revision; its name will be changed to the *Niveaux de competence linguistique canadiens* (NCLC)

3. In the 2000 version of the CLB, listening and speaking were treated as separate skill areas; as a result, this had to be reflected in the overall structure of the test.

A One-Size-Fits-All test (continued)

(Continued from page 33)

ber missing here?] candidates per version with candidates of similar proficiency levels taking the two tests) that are offered at the SLI, including those in the SLC 1-8 range. (See Appendix 2 for a list of these courses). This was done for a number of reasons. First, piloting the tests with candidates at different levels of competence in their L2 would clearly indicate if the more proficient students were able to succeed better than weaker students on the full range of subtests. Second, it allowed us to identify items that did not work well; i.e., distracters that were misleading, entire subtests that did not discriminate, questions with more than one possible correct answer, topics that were inappropriate. Based on this first field testing, we made a number of changes to the two versions of the tests.

Subsequent to this, we made arrangements with La Magie des lettres, the only local adult education organization during the test development phase that offered the CLIC programme. La Magie also offered programmes focussing on literacy and integration (a programme for students who left school early and needed help with numeracy and literacy skills). When we piloted the tests at La Magie, we discovered that a large number of students were not literate according to the traditional understanding of this term and, therefore, could not take the test. Of those who were literate, many had great difficulty doing the test: unfamiliar as they were with the testing format, the types of tasks used, and the time limits. This hands-on experience was one of the first indications that our traditional approach to test design might have to be modified.[4] Based on our experimentation, we again revised Versions A and B of the test.

In order to pilot our tests on a more diverse adult clientele, we contacted the Collège universitaire St. Boniface (CUSB) in Manitoba, which offered a number of FLS courses for adults. Another rea-

son for the choice of this institution was that its teachers had been part of the Focus Group in the early stages of this project. The teachers from St. Boniface were asked to benchmark each of the subtests in Versions A and B in terms of the SLC. They then gave both versions of the tests to their students to enable us to establish cutoffs for the two tests and also to compare their level of difficulty. The statistical analyses carried out on the two tests are reproduced in Table 1.

> *"Of those who were literate, many had great difficulty doing the test ..."*

	Version A, standards 1 to 8	Version B, standards 1 to 8
Number of items	47	47
Sample	26	26
Mean	26,923	30,154
Variance	53,609	39,284
Standard Deviation	7,322	6,268
Bias	0,220	0,783
Kurtosis	0,484	0,180
Minimum	13,000	13,000
Maximum	41,000	39,000
Median	26,000	31,000
Alpha	0,850	0,817
SEM	2,836	2,680
Mean P	0,573	0,642
Mean total items	0,348	0,323
Mean biserial	0,468	0,441
Maximum Score	22	26
N (low)	7	7
Minimum Score	30	35
N (high)	8	8

Table 1: Statistics

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4. Prior to designing the test, I had consulted with people at La Magie and observed classes, but because of the small number of people in the program and the frequent absences, it was difficult to obtain an accurate appraisal of the students enrolled in the programme.

A One-Size-Fits-All test (continued)

The statistics show that the tests are very close in terms of levels of difficulty. As well, the benchmarking of the various subtests by the instructors at CUSB proved to be quite accurate with candidates at the upper levels of proficiency doing better on the more difficult tests (as judged by the teachers) than the weaker students. On the basis of this field testing, we made some minor changes to our subtests and established cutoffs for the two tests (See Table 2).

Standard 1	jusqu'à 10
Standard 2	11-15
Standard 3	16-20
Standard 4	21-25
Standard 5	26-30
Standard 6	31-35
Standard 7	36-39
Standard 8	40-44
Standard 8+	45 +

Table 2: Cutoffs for Listening Comprehensions Tests: Versions A et B

The text used in the subtests were semi-authentic or authentic, drawn from the francophone media or taken from government documents (services and ministries) related to the life of new Canadians. Version A of the test consisted of 40 questions, Version B of 39; they take 29.34 and 27.40 minutes, respectively, to administer. As will be seen later, these tests are not part of the official placement test (Test de classement: Version rationalisée (TCVR), as listening comprehension is tested within the oral interview.

They have been used, however, with students at La Cité collégiale, the local community college for francophones, who are at the advanced level and who need to be evaluated in terms of their listening, reading and writing, the standard skill set for admission to college and university

programmes. Based on the three evaluation sessions given to date, the correlations among the scores are above acceptable levels.

Reading Comprehension - Compréhension de l'oral

As both the reading and listening test were developed at the same time, we proceeded in much the same way with the gathering of materials from various sources and in the test development and field testing process. The team responsible for developing the reading subtests produced 30 tests. As a first step, we asked all the French teachers at the SLI to evaluate each of the subtests in terms of the classes that we offer in FLS (see Appendix 1). To do so, we provided them with a grid based on the first 8 levels of the SLC. Once this was done, the subtests were paired up and then pilot tested in the ongoing French classes (each subtest was evaluated by approximately 80-100 students in four classes of learners).

Each test was used at the appropriate level as well as one level higher. While we were aware that this was not the intended clientele for the tests, as a result of this process we were able to identify the tests that were too easy or too difficult as well as tests that did not work - the topic proved to be inappropriate, the questions were not well formulated, etc.. As well, this process enabled us to make changes to the questions in the subtests that had problems in terms of the question format and formulation. Tests that were not suitable were eliminated.

As the same time as we did this at the SLI, we asked the teachers from CUSB to evaluate the level of difficulty as well as the appropriateness of each task using the CLB/SLC. We also wanted to know if the tasks would be doable for their student population.

After this first round of experimentation, we made another decision, namely, that if the test was to be less than thirty minutes, we could not test all 8 SLC with

"...we were able to identify the tests that were too easy or too difficult as well as tests that did not work..."

A One-Size-Fits-All test (continued)

(Continued from page 35)

one test but rather we would have to create one test for SLC 1-4 and another for SLC 5-8. Given the number of subtests that we had, we were able to create two versions for the Elementary level (SLC 1-4) and two for the Intermediate level (SLC 5-8). They were designated as Versions A and B, respectively.

We field tested the two versions of the elementary and intermediate levels with a more appropriate clientele at La Magie des lettres and the CUSB. We also contacted people in Moncton and Plurielles in Winnipeg but as these institu-

tions focused more on literacy, they were deemed not to be appropriate. At the two participating institutions, we asked the professors to evaluate their students on the four skill areas using the SLC developed by Raymond Le Blanc. The results of the statistical analyses carried out are reproduced in tables 3 to 6.

Based on the key statistical indicators (median, Alpha, P Average, Item Mean (Total)), the two versions of each test were found to be comparable in difficulty and to have met the other criteria for acceptability and reliability at both the item and test level.

> *"We field tested the two versions of the elementary and intermediate levels with a more appropriate clientele ..."*

Number of items	39
Number of candidates	15
Mean	27,700
Variance	142,210
SD	11,925
Distortion	-1,093
Kurtosis	-0,547
Minimum	4,000
Maximum	36,000
Median	34,000 87%
Alpha	0,974
SEM	1,934
Mean P	0,710
Mean-total items	0,737
Mean biserial	0,852
Maximum score (low)	8
N (low group)	4
Minimum score (high)	36
N (high group)	4

Table 3: Statistics – Reading Version A: Standards 1 à 4

Number of items	39
Number of candidates	15
Mean	27,700
Variance	142,210
SD	11,925
Distortion	-1,093
Kurtosis	-0,547
Minimum	4,000
Maximum	36,000
Median	34,000 87%
Alpha	0,974
SEM	1,934
Mean P	0,710
Mean-total items	0,737
Mean biserial	0,852
Maximum score (low)	8
N (low group)	4
Minimum score (high)	36
N (high group)	4

Table 4: Statistics – Reading Version B: Standards 1 à 4

A One-Size-Fits-All test (continued)

(Continued from page 36)

A second round of field testing was undertaken:

1. to ensure that the two versions of the test were adapted to the target populations,

2. to determine that the results obtained the first time were reproduced and that the revisions made after round one were reflected in the candidate's performance,

3. to set the cutoffs scores based on the instructor's evaluations of the candidate's ability and the latter's perform-

ance on the tests (this was done using the statistical procedure called *best fit)*

4. to be certain that the test population was representative of diverse language and ability backgrounds and that it was composed of an equal number of men and women.

Based on this second round, we established cutoffs for the tests and included a bridging test - a test found on both the elementary and intermediate levels of Versions A and B. Having such a test ena-

> *"..testing was undertaken to be certain that the test was composed of an equal number of men and women."*

Number of items	40
Number of candidates	35
Mean	26,111
Variance	56,543
SD	7,520
Distortion	-2,081
Kurtosis	4,490
Minimum	0
Maximum	34,000
Mean	27,000 68%
Alpha	0,880
SEM	2,607
Mean P	0,653
Mean-total items	0,435
Mean biserial	0,585
Maximum score (low)	25
N (low group)	8
Minimum score (high)	30
N (high group)	10

Table 5: Statistics – Reading Version A: Standards 5 à 8

Number of items	39
Number of candidates	35
Mean	26,800
Variance	39,120
SD	6,255
Distortion	1,153
Kurtosis	1,220
Minimum	8,000
Maximum	36,000
Mean	29,000 74%
Alpha	0,865
SEM	2,297
Mean P	0,687
Mean-total items	0,415
Mean biserial	0,593
Maximum score (low)	24
N (low group)	7
Minimum score (high)	31
N (high group)	9

Table 6: Statistics – Reading Version B: Standards 5 à 8

A One-Size-Fits-All test (continued)

(Continued from page 37)

bles evaluators be able to place candidates at the appropriate level. In addition, having two versions at each level allows for a pre-test/post-test evaluation of students placed at a given CLIC level.

Tests at the elementary level are 30 minutes in duration and those at the intermediate level 35 minutes in duration.

Speaking and Listening Comprehension (Compréhension de l'oral et expression orale)

The information and results obtained from the listening and reading tests, along with our conversations with teachers teaching in both the LINC and CLIC courses, played an important role in shaping the Oral Interview protocol. The most important of these was certainly the

fact that we would have to design an interview that would allow us to evaluate a candidate's speaking and listening abilities at the same time, as a number of candidates would have oracy but not literacy (ability to read and write). In our discussions with CIC, we were told that our test should be modelled on the Streamlined Placement Test that had already been developed for the LINC programs.

In developing this part of the TCVR, we made a number of important decisions, some of which have proved to be sound, while others we have had to modify. First, we decided that the Listening/Speaking test should be given first and that it should begin with asking candidates to fill out a personal information sheet with questions ranging from the very simple to the more

> *"Having such a test enables evaluators be able to place candidates at the appropriate level."*

Reading Comprehension I Version A		Reading Comprehension I Version B	
Final Score I A	**Standard**	**Final Score I B**	**Standard**
0 – 15	1	0 – 13	1
16 – 24	2	14 – 27	2
25 – 30	3	28 – 34	3
31 – 36	4	35 – 43	4
37 +	4+	44 +	4+

Table 7: Cutoff levels for Version A and B

Reading Comprehension II Version A		Reading Comprehension II Version B	
Final Score II A	**Standard**	**Final Score II B**	**Standard**
0 – 5	4	0 – 7	4
6 – 24	5	8 – 24	5
25 – 28	6	25 – 28	6
29 – 33	7	29 – 35	7
34-38	8	36 - 39	8
39 +	8+		

Table 7a: Cutoff levels for Version A and B

A One-Size-Fits-All test (continued)

advanced; i.e., What is your name?, to questions about the type of books they like to read, hobbies, and so on.

By asking candidates to fill out such a questionnaire, we are able to determine if they can read and write, and, if they can, whether they are they able to answer even the more complex questions. When the interviewer receives and scans the questionnaire, (s)he can make an initial judgement about the proficiency level of the candidate to be interviewed.

Also, by beginning with the interview, the evaluator would be able to suggest for literate candidates which level of the Reading Test they should take, as well as possible writing tasks within their level range. Based on the field testing to date, this has proved to be a wise decision.

Second, instead of using a 'scenario' (a group of pictures to tell a story), we decided to use a series of images for the students to describe, taken from a Canadian calendar. As will be indicated later, this plan had to be modified. Third, in order to respond to the needs of CLIC clientele, we chose three different listening passages requiring a global summary and a response to a number of questions. As a result of these decisions, we developed an interview protocol that consisted of the following parts:

1. Completion of a personal information sheet.

2. A warm up based on the information found in the sheet (if the candidate was not able to complete the sheet, the questions on the sheet were asked orally) and a probing of background and experience.

3. Description of a picture

4. A listening passage (Approx. 2-3 minutes): Summary and discussion based on questions and personal reflections

5. A windind down: questions of a personal nature to leave the student with a feeling of accomplishment.

6. Evaluation of the students' speaking and listening abilities using the guide and grids provided.

At any stage of the interview, if the candidates were no longer able to complete a task, the interview was to be ended with the Wind Down phase.

Once the testing team had developed the Oral Interview, a number of students taking classes at the SLI were asked to participate in the first round of experimentation. As well, a teacher from La Magie des letters lettresobserved the interviews and provided us with feedback on the content, the organization and the types of tasks used in relation to the target clientele. Based on the first round of pilot testing, we revised the protocol and conducted another series of interview interviews with candidates from the SLI to determine if the new changes were effective and, if the procedures outlined for the interview were clear and easy to follow. As with the first round, the teacher from La Magie sat in on the interviews. After making additional changes, we set up a series of interviews with candidates attending La Magie who were in CLC levels 1-5 as well as some students who were in the Integration Programme.

On the basis of this round of experimentation with the target clientele, we discovered some important limitations of a one-size-fits-all test. The first candidate that we interviewed could not fill out the questionnaire as she had never learned to read or write. However, she was quite articulate; she could clearly describe her background and experience using an acceptable range of French vocabulary and structures. She had what Cummins calls Basic Intercommunication Skills (BICS) but did not have Cognitive Academic Language proficiency Proficiency (CALP). When she was asked to describe one of the images, she had some difficulty as she was not familiar with the the Canadian landscape.

Finally, when asked to listen to and summary summarize the listening passage, she was not able to complete this task but was able to talk about the experiences of young boys as school in

"The first candidate that we interviewed could not fill out the questionnaire as she had never learned to read or write. "

A One-Size-Fits-All test (continued)

Haiti. The very academic nature of the task- listen and summarize- was not familiar to her as she had very little schooling. What were seemingly easy tasks proved to be very difficult for people who had little or no academic training. They proved to be even more challenging for people who were 60+ and had very little exposure to North American culture.

After this experience and at the request of CIC, we decided to substitute sequential story-frame scenarios (Histoires en images) for the still photographs. We created four different ones: 'Registering for a Course', 'The Bus', 'The Fall' and 'The Accident'. Once these had been created and critiqued, we returned to La Magie and conducted another series of interviews.

The scenarios certainly worked better than the still photographs but we still encountered some of the problems mentioned above with candidates who had had no formal schooling. Based on comments we received from the evaluator who conducted the interviews at La Magie, we made changes to 'The Accident' and 'Registering for a Course'.

Since that session at la Magie, the author has used the Interview with students enrolled in the CLIC programme at La Cité collégiale. Based on his experience, he found that 'The Bus' and the 'The Accident' proved to be the easiest for the students, but that candidates who had never frequented an academic institution had great difficulty with 'Registering for a Course'. The context was not familiar to them. Weaker students, when faced with a story scenario, treated each photograph as an isolated image and were not able to construct a narrative. Finally, with the very weak students, the whole interview often centered around their life and that of their families as they did not have the world knowledge or the CALP to deal with most tasks.

It is obvious that students who have oracy but not literacy present a problem for evaluators because while they are fluent they are not able to handle the academic tasks that are part of the

intermediate-level SLC. Do you give them a 6 for fluency but only 3 for task-completion? This needs to be addressed if we are going to be able to provide stake holders with accurate assessment of a candidate's L2 proficiency.

Finally, based on our experience with the Oral Interview, I would suggest using a grid similar to the CanTEST or IELTS grids for assigning a score on both speaking and listening (if the later latter is not measured using the Listening Comprehension Test). The grid that was originally developed indicated whether a candidate was able to accomplish tasks 1-5 of the Oral Interview (mentioned above) Very Well, Well or Not at all.

While knowing this was important, it did not provide us with a level description of a candidate's L2 proficiency. To meet this challenge, we developed a set of Global Performance Descriptors (Descripteurs de performance globale), thumbnail sketches of the twelve proficiency levels for each of the four skill areas. Using the grids for listening and speaking, the evaluator can assign each candidate a an SLC for each of the skill areas.

Writing- Expression écrite

As with Reading and Listening, we gathered materials for the writing tests based on the themes outlined in the LINC programme and the tasks types and suggested topics for each of the 8 SLC levels. The team responsible for this section of the test developed more than 30 tasks for use with candidates at different proficiency levels.

As a next step, the writing tasks were given to the teachers at the SLI to examine in terms of the clarity of the instructions and the feasibility and relevance of the tasks. Once this phase was completed, a selection of these tasks was piloted at La Magie and at the CUSB. All the candidates who had done the two reading tests were asked to complete one of the writing tasks.

"...we still encountered some problems with candidates who had had no formal schooling..."

A One-Size-Fits-All test (continued)

(Continued from page 40)

The writing task selected for each candidate was based on the teacher's evaluation of their L2 ability as measured against the SLC. We corrected the tasks and then assigned each one a Standard using the Writing Grid developed specifically for the test. We next correlated the Standard assigned to the writing sample based on the Writing Grid with that given to the candidates by their teachers to ensure the validity and reliability of the scoring procedures and to obtain a level of difficulty for each of the tasks.

Based on this experimentation, we eliminated and/or modified certain tasks. We also benefited from the feedback of a member of the CCLB in revising our writing bank. We grouped the remaining 25 tasks into Versions A and B. Each version has tasks to cover the 8 SLCs. Having the two versions allows evaluators to use tasks at a similar SLC level at the beginning and end of each course to determine whether candidates have made progress in writing.

The tasks have been used on a experimental basis for research purposes at La Magie, SLI and La Cité collégiale. At La Magie, the author provided candidates with a series of tasks based on their teacher's evaluation of the L2 ability. Each candidate was asked to complete at least three tasks to indicate how well the student could do on increasingly difficult tasks.

One of the things that did come out of this experiment was the importance of task type and topic. In some cases candidates were able to provide a richer and better sample on a task that was considered to be at a higher SLC, pointing again to variables in task selection that are very hard to control.

Finally, it was also evident that it is almost impossible to peg a given writing task to a single SLC (Fox and Courchêne, 2005; Stewart, 2005). There is always a range of SLC levels that can be covered by a single task.

Experimentation with Advanced-level students

On two different occasions, the Reading/Listening/Writing tests have been administered to students enrolled in the Enhanced Language Training Programme at La Cité collégiale.

The results from one of these sessions have been reproduced in Table 8 . The students taking the test were going to be doing office-type work. Version A II (SLC 5-8) of the Reading test and Version A (SLC 1-8) of the Listening test were used).

In general, there is a close correlation between the scores on the Listening (L) and Reading (R) subtests but, as with any testing population, there are anomalies, with the most being found in the relationship of the writing scores (W) to the two others. In two cases, the samples produced were of high quality but very short, so that evaluation is based on a very limited text sample. Similar correlations were found between the three skill areas on the other test. The test will be used again at the beginning of the fall semester.

Conclusion

Developing a placement test for a primarily homogeneous group of students presents a serious challenge.

Moreover, or However, when it

"One of the things that did come out of this experiment was the importance of task type and topic. "

#	L	R	W
1	8	7	5
2	6	7	5
3	7	7	4
4	8	7	6
5	7	6	7+/8
6	3	5	7
7	8	7	7
8	8	8	8+
9	8	7	8
10	6	7	8

Table 8: Candidate's test scores

A One-Size-Fits-All test (continued)

needs to be done for groups as diverse as those found in the LINC/CLIC programs, the task is daunting. As the description of the development of the TCVR has shown, designing a single instrument for candidates who are not all literate results in having to make compromises in terms of the test design and the types of tasks that can be used.

For students who have oracy but not literacy, there must be provision within the Oral Interview for these candidates to provide a sample of their L2 ability using non-academic based tasks. In addition, the grid used to measure speaking and listening comprehension must be modified such that candidates who have "BICS" but not "CALP" can be accurately assessed. ∴

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> *"...designing a single instrument for candidates who are not all literate results in having to make compromises..."*

Expression et Compréhension orales **Speaking and Listening**	*Un questionnaire* Question-naire	*Banque de 8 images. 4 histoires en images. 3 passages d'écoute avec questions* Bank of 8 photographs. 4 scenarios. 3 listening passages with ques-tions	*15-20 minutes*
Compréhension de l'écrit **Reading**	*Standards 1 à 4* *Versions A et B*	*Standards 5 à 8* *Versions A et B*	*Standards 1 à 4: 30 min.* *Standards 5-8: 35 min.*
Production écrite **Writing**	*Standards 1 à 4: 8 tâches* *Versions A et B*	*Standards 5 à 8: 8 tâches* *Version A et B*	*20-25 min.*

Manuals were developed for all the tests.
All materials on available in paper and electronic form.

Supplementary Materials			
Comprehension de l'oral **Listening**	*Standards 1-8* Version A	*Standards 1-8* Version B	*Version A : 29.34 min.* *Version B : 27.40 min.*
Descripteurs de perform-ance globale **Global Performance Des-cripters**	*Standards 1-12*	*Les quatre habiletés* Four skills	

Appendix 1: Tests developed for the CIC Project

Can questions be the answer?
By Man Chu Lau

Promoting ESL students' academic and critical literacy through collaborative student inquiry in literature-based discussion.

Man Chu Lau is a Ph.D. candidate, Second Language Education, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, OISE – University of Toronto.

Abstract

This paper describes a proposed reading program for Junior High School level students, based on a transformative pedagogical orientation designed to prompt students to generate their own questions about texts as a strategy to scaffold and organize their learning. A pilot study done in Hong Kong (2003) and many other research reports (for example, Martinez-Roldan & Lopez-Robertson, 2000) point to the conclusion that engaging ESL students in critical dialogue with English texts (instead of just teaching decoding skills) improves both their critical skills and language ability.

Informed by Vygotskyian sociocultural theory and critical pedagogy, the proposed reading program is premised on the belief that learning is fundamentally socially-situated and is tied to values, ideologies and beliefs.

Training junior high level students to raise questions that move beyond Reciprocal Teaching's main focus on text comprehension towards making personal connections and critical reflections will help prompt critical thinking and thereby facilitate both text comprehension and critical reflections on their lives and culture.

Introduction

This paper proposes an approach to Junior High School level reading based on transformative pedagogical notions to help students develop academic and critical literacy through the use of question generation as a strategy to scaffold and organize learning.

In the past few decades, cultivating students' critical thinking skills has been a buzz word for education reform initiatives in many countries (Hong Kong included).

Interestingly, this movement had been supported by both conservative and progressive educationists. One common belief that both camps share is that "being able to think critically is a necessary condition for being educated" (Norris, 1985 as cited in French & Rhoder, 1992, p. 185). What makes critical thinking an unprecedented new education agenda is the imperative to meet the demands of "New Capitalism" (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996) and the knowledge-based economy that require workers to be "knowledge workers" who can solve problems creatively and collaboratively (Gebhard, 2004). Hence, the new mandate to transform schools into thinking and knowledge building organizations or "learning communities" (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996, p. 61).

Up to now, a lot of training for critical thinking done in schools, however, has been narrowly-focussed and formalistic (Horn, 2000; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). The concentration has often been limited to improving students' formal rational thinking skills as in how to structure, compare, synthesize and evaluate data by the use of graphic organizers, which in most cases has been taught out of context. Critical pedagogues and post-structural feminists, on the other hand, have strongly opposed this modernist developmental view of literacy and cognitive development which sees intelligence as just an accumulative process of individual mastery of formal logical categories. Critical pedagogues instead firmly believe that learning is fundamentally socially-situated and is tied to values, ideologies and beliefs (A. Luke, 1991).

Post-structural feminists agree strongly with this conceptualization of the social constructedness of individuals. Moreover, they also place a special emphasis on the inseparability of rationality and emotion (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993).

Based on these beliefs, the proposed Junior High level reading approach discussed here embraces the aspirations of critical pedagogy, with an aim to improve

> *"Post-structural feminists agree strongly with this conceptualization of the social constructedness of individuals."*

Can questions be the answer? (continued)

(Continued from page 43)

ESL students' literacy both academically and socially. However, a lot of classrooms with critical orientations are inescapably "transmissional" and "propagandist" (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994), and are characterized by a fundamental reliance on "rhetoric and theoretical analyses" without focusing on learning and teaching effectiveness (Cummins, 2000). In order to break through these two limitations, the proposed approach will attend to both effective language learning and greater student empowerment. Researchers on Reciprocal Teaching (RT) (Palincsar & Brown, 1984, , 1989) among others, inform us that the transfer of responsibility of question generation to students helps not only language improvement and thinking abilities, but also facilitates student ownership of learning. Based on the positive findings of RT advocates on the efficacy of collaborative student inquiry, the reading approach described here proposes to use student question generation as a strategy in literature-based discussion. It also moves beyond RT's narrow focus on text comprehension to include in the process both personal connections and critical reflections on themes. For brevity, the proposal will embed the rationale and literature review within the theoretical framework. The procedures will also include a general picture of how this goal might be accomplished.

Pilot Study

The proposed approach has its roots in a pilot action research study (Lau, 2003) that I conducted in 2 classes of Grade 7 ESL (English as a Second Language) students in an English-medium secondary school in Hong Kong in 2002, with the aim of cultivating students' thinking skills. What prompted the project was the observation that ESL students often suffered from a noticeable lack of critical ability and had few opportunities in classrooms to engage in more abstract and higher-order thinking activities.

The pilot program was designed along the principles and beliefs in communicative language learning and the 'community of inquiry' approach (Portelli & Church, 1995). In the five sessions which spanned two months, I read age-and-interest-relevant story books with students, and engaged them in literature-based, Socratic discussions by raising thought-provoking questions that relate to their real lives. Students were asked questions that engaged them in a variety of thinking skills as classified by Ennis (1996), namely deductive validity and invalidity, concept reformulation, causal inferencing, analogical reasoning, evaluation of evidence, reflective thinking and creative thinking.

In addition to informal observations of student participation in class discussion, a qualitative analysis on their discussions and the follow-up written assignments was conducted. It also included an informal student interview. Results showed that students from the two classes (one being an able class and the other a remedial class) became more active in participation in discussion, not just in quantity but also in quality. Contributions moved away from the initial "Yes" or "No" simple answers to extended responses. There was a marked improvement in precision in their arguments and in their mastery of various thinking skills, both in the discussion and in the follow-up written assignments. What was

> *"As the project moved to the final sessions students...started responding to each other's opinions and raising questions without the teacher's prompting intervention."*

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1. **"Community of inquiry"** was advocated by one of the leading critical thinking movements that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in North America— **Philosophy for Children** (Portelli & Reed, 1995). The movement was initiated by Lipman and his associates (Bynam & Lipman, 1976) who were concerned with the perceived diminution of children's ability to reason and to solve problems. Lipman started off writing and reading stories to children in class, inviting them into the fictional world where they would practice and hone the art and craft of thinking (Lipman, 1989).

2. In the former school that I was serving, ESL students are streamed into basically three groups: able, average, and remedial.

Can questions be the answer? (continued)

encouraging was that as the project moved to the final sessions, students, especially in the able class, started responding to each other's opinions and raising questions without the teacher's prompting intervention.

Drawing on the promising results in the pilot investigation, the present action research attempts to take the previous study to the next level - exploring the desirability (in terms of promoting students' language and critical cognitive development) of transposing the responsibility of question generation to students in ESL reading lessons, structured around literature-based discussion.

Theoretical Framework

Critical literacy and transformative pedagogy

Critical literacy is part and parcel of the critical pedagogy traditions, with which Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren and Ira Shor are strongly associated (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Critical literacy sees literacy as never a purely psychological or developmental phenomenon, but always a social and cultural practice. Literacy development is not just about individuals' cognitive schema or background knowledge, but also about "the cultural, community and social resources, texts and, discourses" that they have access to in their everyday life (A. Luke & Freebody, 1997, p. 208). Any cultural text, be it print or non-print, is not neutral or value-free. Some texts fit more easily within the experiential realm of particular groups of people and their worldviews and can be easily understood and responded to. The same texts, however, may lie outside the experiences of other individuals and those persons often find their views marginalized and silenced. Ira Shor defines critical literacy as

...analytic habits of thinking, reading, writing, speaking, or discussing which go beneath surface impressions, traditional myths, mere opinions, and routine clichés; understanding the social contexts and consequences of any subject matter; discovering the deep meaning of any event, text, technique, process, object, statement, image, or situation; *applying that meaning to your own context.* (1992, p. 32) (the present author's italicized emphasis)

Critical literacy provides students with a language of critique that allows them to have critical understanding of social representations; the ultimate aim is to empower every individual to become an active reader and writer of cultural texts who creates his/her own meanings and may thus be able to shape and transform their social conditions, i.e. to be able to read both the *word* and the *world* (Friere & Macedo, 1987). Critical literacy thus

...pushes the definition of literacy beyond the traditional decoding or encoding of words in order to reproduce the meaning of text and society until it becomes *a means for understanding one's own history and culture and their connection to current social structur.* [italics added] (Shannon, 1991, p. 518)

Some have found that Barbara Kingsolver's perceptions in the novel "Animal Dreams" (1991) best summarize what literacy should do: "You learn to read so you can identify the reality in which you live, so that you can become a *protagonist...* rather than a *spectator*" [italics added] (Estes, 1995).

A lot of lessons with critical pedagogical orientations, however, suffer from the kind of blindspot similar to what Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) describe in most media education. Teachers often see themselves as "savior" (p.129) whose attempt is to salvage innocent, naïve and passive students from social delusions, failing to recognize the presence of student resistance and agency. Teachers may often fail to see the inherent power relationships in classroom, and lessons inevitably de-

"Teachers often see themselves as [a] 'savior'..."

Can questions be the answer? (continued)

generate into "transmission" (p. 129) and "propagandist" (p. 130) types of teaching, which - contrary to the beliefs of critical pedagogy - do not encourage open and equal dialogue for student empowerment.

In addition, many critical scholars basically view student learning from a purely "critical" rather than "effectiveness" orientation (Cummins, 2000, p. 248). They disdain the narrow concept of "achievement" and the obsession with test scores. Their research, often qualitative in nature and lacking any outcome measures, also fails to reach a useful level of analysis of school effectiveness, even though it is potentially effective (ibid).

Cummins has argued that critical perspectives should move from *rhetoric* and *theoretical analyses* to a more detailed focus on the specific forms of pedagogy that will develop effective student learning that can be assessed by most tests, while at the same time expand students' social critical ability. He (Cummins, 2004) also attempts to bring the two perspectives into a dialogue by devising a nested model of transmission-constructivist-transformative pedagogy. Language learning, he argues, should include

1. the mastery of formal features (done through a *transmission pedagogical orientation*),

2. students' experiential learning of the target language (through *social constructivist pedagogical orientation*)

3. depth of critical understanding (through *transformative pedagogical orientation*) so that students can effectively achieve both academic and critical literacy.

The reading program design proposed here follows this balanced critical perspective, drawing attention both to students' language development and their critical cognitive ability.

> "Research has proven that engaging ESL students in critical dialogue with English texts improves both their critical skills and language ability."

Vygotskian sociocultural Theory of Mind and Reciprocal Teaching

Sociocultural theory of mind maintains that social interaction is essential to development of language and cognitive functions, such as voluntary memory or reasoning (Vygotsky, 1987). Cognitive activities are mental activities external to the learner but in which s/he participates through mediation (e.g. the use of language). Language mediates the process whereby external activities are transformed into mental ones through internalization (Swain, 2000; Wertsch & Stone, 1985). In other words, critical thinking abilities can be internalized by individuals over the course of multiple opportunities to participate in collaborative inquiry and discussions that elicit and support critical thinking (Commeyras & Sumner, 1995a).

My contention is that this process should also apply to second language learning. If we would like ESL students to demonstrate high-order literacy skills and have the English ability to argue, analyze, formulate and synthesize opinions in a logical and critical manner, a natural strategy would be to engage them actively in tasks that require the actual use of such skills. Contrary to the common belief that ESL students have to be very proficient in language skills before they can proceed to higher-order language activities (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001 ; Martinez-Roldan & Lopez-Robertson, 2000), research has proven that engaging ESL students in critical dialogue with English texts improves both their critical skills and language ability (for example, Lau, 2003; Martinez-Roldan & Lopez-Robertson, 2000).

Most literature-based discussions or the so-called 'Grand Conversations" (Peterson & Eeds, 1990) did provide lan-

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3. "Grand Conversations" is a term used to refer to student discussion after reading the same book. It is a dialogue among students that encompasses inquiry and critique, facilitating understanding that goes beyond those of individual members.

Can questions be the answer? (continued)

QAR Framework (Raphael, 1982, 1986)		
In the text	Right there	Questions are literal and answers are explicitly stated in the text.
	Think and search	Questions require readers to draw a conclusion by integrating text information from different parts of the passage.
In your head	The author and you	Questions require readers to think and infer based on their knowledge and text information.
	On your own	Questions are related to the text and topic but require readers to draw solely on their own experiences.

Table 1

guage students with opportunities to engage in tasks that require more demanding negotiation of meaning and deeper exploration of culture and society (for example, Kauffamn & Short, 2001; Montgomery, 2000; Raphael, Floria-Ruane, George, Smith, & Compton-Lilly, 2001; Silvers, 2001). Very few of them, however, have a specific focus in developing students' ability to raise questions about their concerns and interests related to the text.

As Donaldson argues, "[m]ost of the knowledge that matters to us - the knowledge that constitutes our conception of the world, of other people and of ourselves - is not developed in a passive way. We come to know through processes of active interpretation and integration. We ask questions ..." (cited in Commeyras & Sumner, 1995a, p. 19).

Therefore, in order to help students give birth to critical, self-authored thinking that facilitates both text comprehension and critical reflections of their lives and culture, the proposed reading program incorporates both the critical perspective and Vygotsky's theory of cognitive and language development, with a specific focus on student questioning.

In designing the framework for such a reading program, the literature on developing students' question generation has been helpful. There have been systematic attempts by language teachers to encourage student inquiry and question generation by adopting the Reciprocal Teaching model (RT) (Palincsar & Brown, 1984, 1989).

One major criticism of RT is that students are often not encouraged to raise questions for discussion that go beyond the parameters of the text to a deeper personal reflection and consideration of related issues (Commeyras, 1995b). Also some have found that too many RT lessons generate

"Students are often not encouraged to raise questions for discussion that go beyond the parameters of the text."

4., RT views comprehension as an active and strategic problem-solving activity, based on the research finding that good readers think, interpret and raise questions automatically as they read (Weedman & Weedman, 2001). The aim of RT is to help students become active learners who anticipate and formulate questions about the texts as they read. The four strategies that RT uses are 1. raising questions about the texts, which are to generate discussions, 2. summarizing the gist of what has been read and discussed; 3. clarifying for restoring meaning when a concept or word is unfamiliar to the group member(s); and 4. predicting for the upcoming text based on the clues in the text (Palincsar & Herrenkohl, 2002). The procedure is characterized as a dialogue between teacher and students structured by the four strategies, with the teacher modeling and scaffolding the discussion at the initial stage and progressively withdrawing as students become more confident and proficient in the use of the strategies and take turns to be the group leader (Alfassi, 2004; King & Johnson, 1999; Rosenshine & Meister, 1993; Pisha & Brady, 2000).

Can questions be the answer? (continued)

(Continued from page 47)

mostly literal questions and there is the evident need to move students from literal to more thought-provoking questions (Wood, Woloshyn, & Willoughby, 1995).

There have been, however, adaptations done to the original RT model to give greater emphasis on the question-raising component and to move beyond literal comprehension using the Question-Answer Relationship framework (QAR) devised by Raphael (Raphael, 1982, , 1986) (for example, Dermody & Speaker, 1999; Lawrence, 2002; Mesmer & Hutchins, 2002).

Table 1 shows the kinds of questions students are encouraged to formulate in the QAR Framework.

However, the aspects calling for personal reflection and critical inquiry on social assumptions and beliefs are still lacking in the QAR framework. Inspired by Cummins' collaborative process in critical inquiry (which is derived from Au's (1979) *experience-text- relationship approach* and Ada's (1988a, 1988b) *creative reading ap-*

proach) (2001, p. 134), a new framework for student question generation is proposed in order to address this limitation.

> *"Three dimensions of student question generation are included in the framework ..."*

Literal dimension—Promote comprehension of the text.

e.g. **Content**

- *Who can tell me what the story is about?*
- *How would you describe the main character as a person?*
- *What happened to the main character?*
- *How did he resolve the conflicts? Why did he do that?*

Form

- *What do you have to say about the writer's style?*
- *How does the setting help you understand the character's feeling?*

Personal dimension—Relate the text content to their personal experiences.

- *e.g. How would you feel if someone called you names, like what happened to the main character?*
- *Do you think it is easy to accept an outsider?*
- *How would you compare yourself to the main character?*
- *If you were telling this story, how might you end it? Why?*

Critical dimension—Critically analyze issues or problems and encourage reflection on themes related to the social realities.

- *e.g. What can we do to stop this kind of injustice happening in our society?*
- *Do you see similar kinds of judging among people in the real world?*
- *How might others (e.g. women, adults) interpret the text?*

Table 2

Can questions be the answer? (continued)

Table 2 shows the proposed framework for student collaborative inquiry.

Three dimensions of student question generation are included in the framework which aims to encourage active inquiry not only into the text (Literal dimension), but also personal connections with the fictional world (Personal dimension) and critical exploration of concepts and ideas related to social and cultural realities (Critical dimension). Students, after reading the same literary material, are asked to work together to formulate questions related to the three dimensions.

The notion of collaborative inquiry is consistent with the Vygotskian perspective of individual cognitive and language development (Mitchell & Myles, 2004; Moll, 1990).

The three dimensions are also in accord with Cummins' nested model of transmission-constructivist-transformative pedagogical orientations (2004). This scheme serves to push students beyond the literal understanding of the text to a more meaningful engagement with it. In the proposed model, the personal dimension is viewed as equally important part in a classroom with transformative orientations.

It is often easier to find fault with other people or situations in the world as they are reflected in literary works than to recognize one's implicit or embedded beliefs and assumptions. An inquiry-based approach to the study of literature invites readers to engage in critical reflection of their personal experiences and deeply held beliefs or biases.

By engaging in this process students can come to a fuller self-awareness and a deeper critical understanding of social realities, which are needed in order to effect any social change (Silvers, 2001).

Postmodern theories of intelligence, especially those proposed by poststructural feminists, draw our attention to the inseparability of rationality and emotion (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993).

Real critical ability is not limited to formal rationality, but also includes personal interrogation of tacit beliefs and values. Providing students with opportunities for maximized emotional investment and connections facilitates their broader awareness, which in turns generates greater potential for change and social engagement.

Procedures

In developing a new approach, it is proposed that there would be 3 phases in the process through which the responsibility for posing questions for literature-based discussion could be transferred gradually to students.

Phase 1: Direct instruction of strategies (3-4 whole-class sessions)

Students are introduced to posing questions on the three different dimensions (literal, personal and critical) after reading a story together. The teacher models and practices with students direct explanation of the kinds of questions formulated and the importance of phrasing of questions. Appendix One shows the sample questions for a reading lesson on *Crow Boy* by Taro Yashima (Picture Puffin 1976).

Phase 2: Guided practice (4-5 whole-class/ pair-work sessions)

Students in the whole class generate questions on the three dimensions with guidance from the teacher, a process to be completed in small measured steps with cued scaffolding from the teacher who progressively withdraws as students in pairs practice generating questions on their own.

Phase 3: Students work in pairs (5-6 sessions)

Students in pairs generate questions from the text after reading it together with the whole class. They rejoin the class for discussion on the questions generated.

"By engaging in this process students can come to a fuller self-awareness and a deeper critical understanding of social realities."

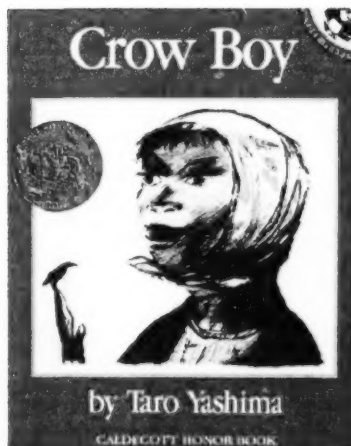# Can questions be the answer? (continued)

Conclusion

"We learn by asking questions. We learn better by asking better questions. We learn more by having opportunities to ask more questions [italics added]." (Morgan & Saxton, 1991).

Based on this pedagogy of student questioning, the proposed reading approach aims to provide a more balanced language curriculum in a classroom where the students are not only *learning language* and *learning about language*, but also *learning through language*.

Through a democratic community of inquiry, students are encouraged to take an active role in achieving a better understanding of the text, a closer and deeper emotional connection and reflection on the issues brought up in the fictional world, and ultimately come to read the world in general in a more critical way. ❖

Appendix

Crow Boy, by Taro Yashima is a story about Chibi, a boy who for five years is made to feel alienated and isolated at school. His new teacher in sixth grade, however, takes an interest in him and is amazed at his ability to imitate the sound of crows. Chibi's understanding of nature is openly recognized for the first time at school and the new teacher even asks Chibi's classmates to learn from him. It is a compelling story about discrimination and the need to respect differences. The book provides rich material for discussion on all forms of discrimination and exploration of how it feels like to be excluded.

1. Literal dimension e.g. Content

- *Who can tell me what the story is about?*

- *Why is he called "Crow Boy"?*

- *Why do his classmates refuse to play with him?*

- *Does he have a part to play in his being isolated?*

- *What does the new teacher do to help Crow Boy regain his self-esteem?*

Form

- *Are you satisfied with the ending?*

- *What do you think of the writer's style? Is it different from what you used to read?*

2. Personal dimension e.g. *Are student bullies a major issue in your school/ class?*

- *Do you think it is easy to get accepted by a group when you are the outsider?*

- *Do you think it is easy for you to accept an outsider?*

- *Do you like to have such a teacher who can see the best in you?*

- *Are you like the teacher who can see the best in everyone?*

3. Critical dimension e.g. *Can you find other kinds of discrimination in our society?*

- *What do you think constitute such discrimination?*

- *What do you think can be done to change the situation?*

Sample Questions on Crow Boy by Taro Yashima – a Caldecott Honor Book. Picture Puffin, 1976

Can questions be the answer? (References)

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